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STUDIES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

*Volume X*

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## GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY

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#### FAMILY OF FARMER IN WILLIAMS COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA

The farmers of America, whether needing relief or not, are honest, hard-working, courageous citizens, as Resettlement (now Farm Security) photographers say in pictures that emphasize the human beings involved in their programs. Children, especially, are worth saving. (Photo by Russell Lee.)

# GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY

ITS PRACTICE  
IN FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION

\*

By JAMES L. McCAMY

*Social Studies Faculty, Bennington College*



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## PREFACE

IN THE customary division of public administration into topics for study, publicity practices are part of the larger category of "public relations." Federal agencies touch citizens in many varied ways, and every meeting between "the government" and the citizen is an episode in the complex flow of public relations. Government teaches or transmits knowledge and skill; it issues reports that are prescribed in formal requirement; it answers questions from citizens in profusion. A variety of releases from Washington reflects the varied aims in the relations between the executive branch of government and its clientele of citizens. One mail may bring a technical bulletin from one agency, a preachment from another, or both from the same agency. Distinctions among the parts in this total field of public relations broadly defined can be made, however, according to the dominant purpose of a release, whether for teaching, reporting, answering questions, or persuading, and according to whether the communication between government and citizen, whatever its form, is planned and prepared by experts rather than limited to unplanned and sometimes unrecognized meetings.

Typical federal agencies have experts to plan and prepare releases in programs of deliberate publicity, specialists who, in informal conversation, call themselves "government publicity men" and who are increasingly significant in the orderly conduct of large-scale administrative leadership in a representative form of government. They are not to be confused with publicity agents for political parties and pressure groups, nor should their releases be confused with the publicity from Congress.

This study is concerned, then, with publicity as distinct from teaching or reporting, with public releases by specialists as dis-



tinct from unplanned contacts, and with publicity from the administrative branch of government as distinct from legislative, judicial, or political-party arenas. It is a general description of the nature and practice of federal administrative publicity in the period of 1937-38 against a background of the role of publicity in modern administrative statesmanship. It should fit into a context of some studies already completed and some others that are suggested for the future.

In one of the studies already completed E. S. Wengert described all the various factors in the whole field of public relations for five federal agencies, as a doctoral dissertation with the title *The Public Relations of Selected Federal Agencies* at the University of Wisconsin in 1936. E. Pendleton Herring was concerned with the place of publicity in contemporary government in a chapter of his *Public Administration and the Public Interest*. The Brookings Institution had reported the number and pay of federal publicity specialists for the Byrd Senate Committee to investigate the executive agencies. Several journalists had touched upon aspects of the subject, but neither students nor journalists, so far as I could find, had ever looked comprehensively at publicity practice, rather closely defined, to see what sort of publicity is issued, how it is issued, and how the offices are located in the structure of administrative organization. The present effort is hopefully designed to be a bird's-eye view which may give more meaning to the subject of government's administrative publicity. This might well be followed by more explicit studies of the publicity personnel in government, especially to discover the loyalties and attitudes of these men behind the headlines; of specific publicity campaigns by administrative agencies; of the audience for publicity, to see what citizens think of administration and what can be done to redirect their attitudes; or of the content of federal publicity in relation to social and economic events.

The written sources consulted are cited in the footnotes. Much more important than reading, for the particular orientation needed, were personal interviews with Washington pub-

licity men. These specialists in information were frank, cordial, and uniformly helpful to a transient questioner, but because Washington administrators must be cautious about appearing before the public, they cannot be thanked here by name. My appreciation for their help is none the less for being anonymous. Wherever a statement in the text is assigned to its source in a "personal interview," I owe a debt to one of these generous officials. Of next importance to the interviews were the letters and questionnaires, in themselves modified interviews, which were received from the officials.

Other persons too have helped. The stimulating and intellectually adventurous faculty in political science at the University of Chicago has been influential in directing an interest in public affairs into such a study as this. My colleagues in all the fields at Bennington College for the last four years have also had a part, through long and happy hours of Vermont winter talk which sharpens ideas and relates segments to their whole. More specific criticism has come from helpful readers. Julia Boggess McCamy has clarified many issues by her acute objective questioning and editing. Marshall E. Dimock, of the University of Chicago, read the earlier chapters as they were written and gave encouragement for the rest of the way. He also went over the whole study when it was finished and made valuable suggestions for remedies. Harold D. Lasswell, late of the University of Chicago and now with the William Alanson White Psychiatric Foundation in Washington, is responsible for an improvement in the structure of presentation and for several points that otherwise would have been overlooked. John M. Gaus, of the University of Wisconsin, now temporarily in research in Washington, added some items and clarified others in a thorough reading as a friendly service from a good counselor. Charles S. Ascher, of the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Public Administration, in the early stages generously spent an evening of a Thanksgiving vacation to weed two of the chapters of much that was extraneous in both content and composition. Roy Stryker, who directs the

photography for Farm Security Administration, read two of the chapters and saved me some embarrassing misuse of technical terms. Herbert Emmerich, formerly Deputy Governor of Farm Credit Administration and now Associate Director of Public Administration Clearing House, gave valuable criticism from his viewpoint of the experienced administrative official. To all of these I am deeply grateful. For the sins and mistakes still remaining they are not responsible. All photographs are from Farm Security Administration, United States Department of Agriculture, formerly Resettlement Administration.

Finally, it should be said that conditions are changing steadily in the practice of federal publicity. This study is based on material gathered in 1937 and early 1938. The developments since that time must remain for later description.

J. L. M.

BENNINGTON, VERMONT  
November 15, 1938

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SETTING

**R**EPORTERS in Washington know where federal publicity offices are located in those bewildering architectural monuments that house administration. In many of the offices they use typewriters and share press rooms. In all of them, they receive the frequent "handout," or prepared news story that hopefully records an event, a statement of plan or policy, or any of the many other possible developments that make news and refer in some way to the agency concerned. They can ask questions in all and get answers, for publicity officials exist to provide information.

The publicity men inside most of the offices engage, as well, in daily activity beyond the mere preparation of news releases and replies to questions. A program in public administration has to be explained to the people who will be affected by it. Publicity men must find the ways of getting information to the citizens who need to know what the program means, how they can take advantage of it, why they should support it. As a result, these men lead lives of variety. If they work for one of the agencies with an established program of known limits, they may restrict their routine to the preparation of news releases, the answering of questions, the writing of an occasional pamphlet and radio address. They serve at the same time as a link between reporters and the top executive in their agency, either to shield him from too much time-consuming interruption or to arrange for him to see the reporters when a request is commanding. Always the publicity man advises and assists his executive superior in dealing with matters of releasing and withholding news.

In the offices which must publicize newer, less established programs, in the sense of having been adopted since the depres-

sion started in 1929, life is more disturbed. Telephones ring frequently to demand quick compliance with requests for information. News-gathering is a frantic performance, a perpetually desperate race against deadlines and competitors, an imperious disregard of the courtesies in more leisurely trades. Reporters enter the office without formality and expect immediate response, for, again, the publicity official is there to hand out the news of his agency.

At the same time perhaps a telegram has arrived from a newspaper or regional publicity man outside of Washington. A designer of exhibits wants to discuss a plan for a display of the agency's program. A motion-picture director wants to go over the shooting script for an educational short which the office is having made. The picture series for a strip-film or set of slides has to be approved. One of the pictures will have to come out because it too clearly identifies, say, a certain city in connection with very bad slum conditions and the congressman from there would hear from the chamber of commerce. A plan for distributing this strip-film (or movie, exhibit, radio program) must be made. Perhaps a tieup with related state services or another federal office would get a larger distribution.

Next a plan for a pamphlet has to be made, by the publicity expert himself if the staff is small, or has to be approved by him, if the staff includes a subordinate in editorial work. Where are the illustrations? The pictures should help put across the text. Could a graph or pictograph be used instead of the table? What format, what cover design, what type, and what colors, if any, will make the pamphlet most readable and most widely read? The publicity man must make the decisions.

All through the day the varied detail grows. An hour at least must be set aside to outline a speech which the front executive is to give a week hence on a national radio hookup. A conference with the executive must be arranged. The speech can be written in final form and checked for accuracy later, perhaps in the quiet hours at home in the evening. Would it be permissible to suggest that the superior learn to read before he

makes the next speech so he will not mispronounce half the words? The President now in the White House has made it rather hard for slow-tongued officials to get across on the radio. Here, too, on the subject of speeches is one written by a field technician for delivery at a conference. It might also be an article for a technical magazine, with some revision. It must be read now to see if changes for clarity or policy should be gently suggested.

Meanwhile, a magazine article is in process for the front executive. The data will be found and rechecked; the first draft may be written, then a final product will evolve through consultation so that the chief can answer for his signature in print. Some free-lance ghost writers in private practice get a share of credit when the article perhaps comes out "By John J. Executive as Told to George Ghost," but the federal publicity man typically produces his gems for the sole glory of another. This is true of speeches as well as articles.

All such duties as those mentioned so far deal only with producing releases. In addition, the publicity man must study his agency's problems, must analyze the publicity needs, must try to get acquainted with the clientele, and must keep a wary eye on the opposition. He must also follow the news by the hour in order to know when any item relevant to the work of his agency appears in the public media. If a congressman or industrialist makes a speech and refers to an agency, the event has implications pro or con for that agency's publicity official. If a minor employee in an outlying post is caught stealing, it may be printed widely throughout the nation and call for a statement. If some private research is reported as a discovery of weakness in the agency's program, the publicity man must know immediately. He may not reply by a counterrelease to any such attacks, but he builds his comprehensive picture of the national scene and of his agency's place in it from a continuous rough analysis of news.

The study of news also keeps the publicity official acquainted with media. He knows newspapers and magazines as if he

helped to edit them. While other men go to the movies to relax, he watches the newsreel to see what interests received the gains and losses in publicity. The radio too is an instrument of his work.

A variety in the activities of the day's routine is matched by the variety of the topics with which a publicity agent must be familiar. Subjects tend to expand. Writing about electricity on the farm soon leads to such lay mysteries as the handling of milk; a work-relief airport program evokes delving into the planning of landing fields; rural resettlement involves everything from soil types to education; soil conservation may mean allowing brush to grow on fence rows and so raise the possible effects on small game. If the publicity man is not versatile in his interest and knowledge when he begins, he must become so, for telling the public requires that he take advantage of incidental information as well as report the major topics.

From the midst of the turmoil of getting out releases, answering questions, watching news and media, and planning and executing a program, the publicity official is expected to form a synthesis of what his agency is doing and to present an explanation in simple terms. He must find the symbols and means of distribution which will make his audience aware of his agency's policies, practices, and reason for being, and which will bind the citizen to the program in understanding affiliation. It is a large task, one that already requires experts, and one that overworks many officials.

It is, furthermore, a task that wins little acclaim. The role of publicity in public administration remains to be defined clearly in public practice. At present the most noticeable attitude toward it is a prevailing suspicion that the practice of publicity is an insidious effort to "put something over" on Congress and the electorate and that the administrative branch of government has no moral right to employ experts in purposeful information.

## INSECURITY OF THE PUBLICITY FUNCTION

The suspicion in Washington of publicity has aroused such hostility that any calm and illuminating discussion can proceed only after a clearing of biases. Government press agents are reticent in interviews until the interviewer is placed as to his position on this point. The reticence is justified because the publicity function has been under steady fire from journalists, from some members of Congress, and from antiadministration politicians in campaigns.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most effective statement in the letters requesting certain of the data for this study was this invariable promise:

I might add that the material will not be used for an attack upon the publicity function in government. With most contemporary students of public administration I share the realization that work in public relations is just as essential as any other governmental function. Our job as students is to describe and analyze the publicity function just as we study objectively any other service.<sup>2</sup>

In part, the opposition is merely a reflection of the stereotyped irrational resentment of "propaganda" and "press agents" which has arisen in the current tensions of transition from rural primary to urban secondary association in the nation. This cultural suspicion of publicity as a formalized way of persuading people to do something when they do not know they are being persuaded is too familiar to dwell upon.<sup>3</sup> The point here is that the general atmosphere of distrust in which the federal publicity agent works is a factor in his status and forces him more than any other staff official to justify his role.

<sup>1</sup> This is not a condition unique to government publicity agents. Harold D. Lasswell has pointed out that propagandists generally are subject to attack in the name of the morals of democracy ("The Person: Subject and Object of Propaganda," *Annals*, CLXXIX [May, 1935], 192).

<sup>2</sup> Essentially the same statement was made in each of the face-to-face interviews.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. "Citizens are traditionally suspicious of any effort by a public body to advertise itself. They seem to have entirely different standards for business and government" (Marshall E. Dimock, *Modern Politics and Administration* [New York: American Book Co., 1937], p. 283).

The broad criticism of "propaganda" implicit in contemporary culture has led to tangible legal restrictions. An act of 1913 forbade the spending for "publicity experts" of any part of an appropriation unless specifically designated by Congress for that purpose.<sup>4</sup> Representative Frederick H. Gillette, Massachusetts Republican, had discovered the announcement of an open competitive examination for a publicity expert in the Office of Public Roads, Department of Agriculture, whose duties would be to prepare news releases and get them published in newspapers. One qualification was "affiliation with newspaper publishers and writers . . . extensive enough to insure the publication of items." The Forest Service had previously been singled out for criticism, and this time Mr. Gillette urged an amendment as a rider on the Deficiency Appropriation Act of 1913 to prohibit any publicity experts anywhere in any of the executive agencies unless authorized by Congress. He was joined by Representative John J. Fitzgerald, New York Democrat, in arguing that news which was due the public was published without the need of a publicity agent and that no executive office should extol its own virtues or publicize its activities in the press. The debate was short; interest was apparently slight. The only suggestion of defense for publicity came when Representative Asbury F. Lever, South Carolina Democrat, asked if there would be objection to hiring editors to make farm bulletins more attractive and readable and when Representative Richard W. Austin, Tennessee Republican, suggested that, since all constituents were interested in good roads, perhaps Congress should ask the Office of Roads why it wanted the publicity expert. Mr. Gillette replied that his rider would not affect bulletins and that information on roads could still be given out and would be used by newspapers without a press agent to promote it and "to extol and exploit the virtues of this department."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 38 U.S. Stat. 212 (October 22, 1913).

<sup>5</sup> *U.S. Congressional Record*, September 6, 1913 (63d Cong., 1st sess.), pp. 4409-11.

The result of this provision was the evasive hiring of publicity experts under such titles as "Director of Information," "Chief, Division of Information and Education," "Chief Educational Officer," "Editor-in-Chief," "Assistant to the Director" or "Assistant to the Administrator," "Supervisor of Information Research," "Assistant to the Chairman," or "Director of Publication." These titles are taken at random from letters and questionnaires. More prolonged and expensive research would no doubt unearth in the lower ranks more striking oddities adopted to utilize appropriations for purposes other than those assigned. Thus as an incidental example discovered by accident, a person called "Sergeant of the Guard" was serving in early 1937 as receptionist for an exhibit of the work of his agency, performing a needed and effective publicity job.<sup>6</sup>

A more important and more elusive consequence of the 1913 ban is that publicity must be disguised in record-keeping, even as the titles of its practitioners are subtle. Some offices profess to do no more than "educate" the public; others dispense only "information"; and some admit to promoting a program. A clear-cut line between these varied facets of public relations cannot be drawn publicly while the statute enforces evasion. Nor can budgeting and accounting be recorded in open terms of publicity. The significance for good administration of this confusion of terms and attitudes will be developed later in discussions of costs and co-ordination.

A second statutory limitation is the "gag law" of July 11, 1919, which prohibited the use of any part of any appropriation for services, messages, or publications designed to influence any member of Congress in his attitude toward legislation or appropriation. The penalty for violation was removal after hearing by a superior officer and, upon conviction of misdemeanor, a fine of not more than \$500 or imprisonment of not more than

<sup>6</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that many statutes require agencies to disseminate information and education in their fields of work, and Congress has long recognized in appropriations informational practices. The budget annually contains salary schedules for positions bearing titles such as these mentioned.



one year or both. An exception was made to allow executive employees and officials to communicate with members of Congress on the request of any member or through "the proper official channels" concerning legislation or appropriations needed for the conduct of the public business.<sup>7</sup>

This law became prominent during the fierce lobbying over the Copeland food and drug bill in 1933 when one Daniel A. Lundy, an advertising man in Minneapolis, wrote senators suggesting that the chief of the Food and Drug Administration be dismissed for his efforts to bring about adoption of the bill.<sup>8</sup> In this case the Food and Drug Administration dampened its campaign for the Copeland bill and took greater caution about its publicity in general, in spite of the fact that it was authorized in its own appropriation act to illustrate the results of its work. Other agencies as well have followed a policy of caution when this law might be invoked, though in no case has the "gag law" ever been enforced in the extreme interpretation which might be given to it. Obviously, an extreme interpretation would forbid the distribution to congressmen of much of the literature published by administrative agencies.

The third inhibition imposed by law is the requirement that nearly all duplicating beyond what would normally be typewritten must be done by the Government Printing Office.<sup>9</sup> Enacted in 1919, the restriction did not receive its most drastic interpretation until December, 1936, when the Comptroller-General left little room for publishing activities within the administrative agencies. He wrote:

. . . . The permissible field of duplicating work by Government agencies, as distinguished from printing required to be done at the Govern-

<sup>7</sup> 41 U.S. Stat. 68 (July 11, 1919).

<sup>8</sup> Ruth deForest Lamb, *American Chamber of Horrors* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), pp. 295-97, and letter from the author (May 7, 1937). Miss Lamb is chief educational officer of the Food and Drug Administration. For the general conflict of propaganda over the food and drug law see her book and E. Pendleton Herring, "Foods, Drugs, and Poison," *Current History*, XL (April, 1934), 33.

<sup>9</sup> 40 U.S. Stat. 1270 (March 1, 1919).

ment Printing Office is largely limited to the reproduction of typewritten matter which otherwise would be for reproducing by a typewriter. It may be . . . that the use of regular printing type for headings, etc., on such duplicating work will make more effective copy, but if the use of regular printing type is necessary for this purpose, the work itself tends to lose its character of permissible duplicating and may be regarded as printing. The line of demarcation between the two classes of work not being susceptible of exact definition, . . . any doubt as to whether a particular class of work should be done at the Government Printing Office or by means of a duplicating machine should be resolved in favor of the former so as to avoid any violation of the statute.<sup>10</sup>

This ruling was a clarification in that it told administrative agencies how far they could go in publishing their own material, but it was by no means a modernization of the law to conform to the advances in duplicating machinery and to allow the publicity offices to prepare in final and most attractive form some of their publications.<sup>11</sup>

The corollary to formal legislative restrictions on the free play of administrative publicity—and perhaps of greater effect—is the tendency in Congress for members to single out publicity as a useless and somewhat immoral function. No other staff function is so conspicuous as a target for congressmen. Within the last two years, the Works Progress Administration was accused of issuing “propaganda” by Congressman Taber;<sup>12</sup> the whole general practice of publishing information

<sup>10</sup> Comptroller-General's Ruling A-74715, December 12, 1936. Decision rendered to chairman, Federal Power Commission.

<sup>11</sup> An objection to isolated duplicating that is not related to restraints upon publicity is the one that such processed material is not sure of being catalogued for the information of librarians. The Public Printer has requested all agencies to send to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, one copy of each piece of processed matter for cataloguing, but he has no way of checking up on the completeness of the response (U.S. Public Printer, *Annual Report, 1936* [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936], pp. 66–67). The printers' labor unions also resent process-duplicating because, they say, it benefits neither printing nor office workers (*Washington Daily News*, February 2, 1937, p. 22).

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings before the Sub-committee in Charge of Deficiency Appropriations, First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), pp. 114–15.

was questioned by Congressman Scrugham;<sup>13</sup> the *First Annual Report* of the Resettlement Administration drew the fire of Senator Vandenberg, who immediately proposed a resolution requiring the approval of the Senate Committee on Printing before color printing or illustrations might be used in annual reports;<sup>14</sup> and an article from the *Providence Journal* of January 15, 1937, surveying the extent of the administrative press organization was read into the *Congressional Record* by Senator Bridges.<sup>15</sup> These are typical of congressional attacks and are not intended to exhaust the samples. It is clear, as Jay Franklin has said, that "the publicity is already here, but it is necessary to persuade the legislative branch to 'marry the gal.'" Since our Government is increasingly a government of public opinion, politicians are naturally reluctant to authorize a system by which the President can reach the minds of the voters whom congressmen are supposed to represent."<sup>16</sup>

Some of the unofficial attacks, as distinguished from congress-

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, *Interior Department Appropriation Bill for 1936, Hearings before Sub-committee* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), p. 46. Representative Scrugham contributed an opinion derived from editorial experience with wastebaskets. "I would like to make this comment," he said, "in reference to the item . . . for bulletins, pamphlets, leaflets, and so forth, taking just one subdivision, where the amount is \$25,500. Every morning every Congressman gets a number of these bulletins of different kinds and they go immediately into the wastebasket. I was in the newspaper business for a great many years, and every day of the month we got a lot of things, and they went into the wastebasket. . . . I know that every wastebasket I have ever known anything about has had from one to five or ten of these Government bulletins in it every day, and they are never looked at. We have not any time to look at them."

<sup>14</sup> *Washington Post*, January 19, 1937, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> LXXXI, No. 23 (February 3, 1937), 998-99.

<sup>16</sup> "We, the People," a syndicated column (*Washington Evening Star*, January 8, 1937, p. A-9). "Jay Franklin" is the pen name of John F. Carter, who was the organizer and first director of information for Resettlement Administration. He was an experienced newspaper and magazine reporter here and abroad and had served as economic adviser in the State Department's Western European Division. He returned to private journalism after a period with Resettlement Administration.

sional attacks, upon government publicity have been born of wrath out of ill-feeling and begotten with a view to selfish ends. The most extreme vilification was one of the scandal books, written under the pseudonym of George Michael, about the supposedly "inside stuff" in Washington. Half-truths were common in it, and a general odor of unreliability pervaded it.<sup>17</sup>

The more moderate pointing-with-alarm also usually implies some of the same naïve assumption as "George Michael's" that government press agents are a creation of the Franklin Roosevelt administration. Thus, Theodore G. Joslin, once a White House press secretary to President Hoover, speaking to the National Republican Club in New York City, after he had changed jobs, said:

The present administration is the most publicized administration in all history. It is using to the ultimate every known agency of publicity . . . its purpose is to get before the people such information as it wants them to have. . . . [The president] is not an impartial commentator. Rather is he an active participant. . . . He is bent on selling his policies to the country so the country will support him in his acts.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt concerning any statement that the Roosevelt administration has expanded the publicity function in the same way that it has expanded most federal functions (see chap. viii). The assumption that it created the function or that another administration has refused or would refuse to use pub-

<sup>17</sup> George Michael, *Handout* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935). Elmer Davis perhaps gave this book undue notice by reviewing it, but he stated the case against it aptly: "Modestly announced as a book 'to blow the roof off of Washington,' this volume seems more likely to serve the humbler purpose of enabling its authors to blow off steam and perhaps talk themselves out of a neurosis. In support of their contention that the Roosevelt administration has set up a censorship to suppress the facts and a propaganda system to inundate the country with falsehood they make one valid point; but all there is to say about that can be said in a few pages; . . . so to make even a short book the authors have had to pad out their argument with assertions of which some are important if true, and others are obviously neither" ("The New Deal's Uses of Publicity," *New York Times Book Review*, May 19, 1935, p. 5).

<sup>18</sup> *New York Times*, January 27, 1935, sec. 2, p. 2.

licity agents is, however, sheer innocence that does not merit respect.<sup>19</sup>

Some Washington newspapermen have questioned government publicity calmly and with reason. Their objections will be considered in chapter ix and will not be developed here among the hostile attacks. It is enough now to say that practicing newspapermen criticize publicity on the following points: (1) If the press agent is made the sole source of news, the reporter is forced to work harder for unpremeditated revelations, and he must establish undercover contacts which damage the complete and open authenticity of his news; (2) the prearranged press conference, in which the executive meets all reporters at once, favors the executive because he can be advised by his publicity agent ahead of time on the evasion of questions; (3) within the press conference, arranged by a publicity agent, the off-the-record statement, in which the executive prefaces a statement by binding the reporter to confidence, is an insidious way of preventing the reporter from getting the news from another source; (4) the press agent tends to become overcautious in suppressing news when the reporter can see no justifiable reason for suppression; (5) too often the press agent

<sup>19</sup> The history of administrative publicity in the United States would be a long study in itself. It would begin with the alliance between party government and partisan newspapers in the early days of the Republic; that is, with newspapers that served partisan administration as well as political party. The epochal lessons of the World War and Mr. George Creel's Committee on Public Information would be a large chapter, for here was experience with a central propaganda bureau. Administrative publicity in its contemporary scope is generally said to have reached its maturity in the Department of Commerce under the secretaryship of Mr. Herbert Hoover, who became president, some say, on the foundation of a reputation which was not damaged in any way by the Department of Commerce press agents. This is not to say, however, that "information" officials had not been employed by some agencies before the post-war period of Mr. Hoover, as witness the discussion in Congress of the 1913 rider prohibiting the employment of "publicity experts" (*Congressional Record*, September 6, 1913 [63d Cong., 1st sess.], pp. 4409-11). For some publicity practices during the period from the World War until 1932 see F. B. Cowell, "Governmental Departments and the Press in U.S.A.," *Public Administration*, ix (April, 1931), 214, and J. Frederick Essary, "Uncle Sam's Ballyhoo Men," *American Mercury*, XXIII (August, 1931), 419-28.

will ruin a reporter's hard-earned exclusive story by giving the news to all papers to avoid an accusation of partiality; and (6) any centralization of control over news sources, in a single agency and more so in government as a whole, is a danger to freedom of the press.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the criticisms so far retold refer mainly to the press. There have been charges as well that the federal administration in office, no matter what its party, dictates to radio and motion-picture producers a policy favorable to itself. Impartial observers have found radio censorship directly imposed in severity far more by the broadcasting companies themselves than by the Federal Communications Commission, which at best can have only an indirect weight on the broadcasters. The companies are moved to censorship primarily by fear of offending the audience or the advertisers or by fear of being sued for slander. But they also must face questions on whether they have served the public interest when the Commission considers the renewal of licenses. In some cases it is possible that the companies prevent the broadcasting of criticism of government officials from fear of retaliation at relicensing time, but never has the Commission openly suggested favoritism toward officials. The victims of censorship, furthermore, are not all of one faith. They include radicals, liberals, conservatives, doctors, trade-unionists, opponents of lynching, pacifists, and advocates of birth control; and a clear picture of just what government wants to suppress, assuming official censorship, would be hard to extract from the record of forbidden topics.<sup>21</sup> The Commission, however, will insist to no avail against its

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Arthur Krock, "Press vs. Government—a Warning," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 2 (April, 1937), 45-49, also his address to the National Republican Club of New York City, as reported in the *New York Times*, January 27, 1935, sec. 2, p. 2; Franklin, *loc. cit.*; Dorothy Thompson, "U.S. Publicity at Peak," *Washington Evening Star*, January 30, 1937, p. A-10; Leo C. Rosten, *The Washington Correspondents* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937), chaps. iii and iv.

<sup>21</sup> Minna F. Kassner and Lucien Zacharoff, *Radio Is Censored* (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 1936).

critics that it has no power of regulating program content; for as long as it considers the content of past programs in its hearings for licenses, those afraid of the power of government will condemn it as a censor.<sup>22</sup>

It is clear that the federal government has not directly censored the movies in peacetime.<sup>23</sup> The movies, at the same time, have not been conspicuously unfriendly to any federal administration. For one thing, political bias openly avowed would alienate a part of the movie audience, and in a commercial enterprise the better part of wisdom is to remain neutral. Profits lie in conforming to the national mores and in pleasing a maximum of people at all times, and any administration, short of a revolutionary period, would have enough friends in the audience to make an attack upon it unwise. In the event that the commercial interest should prescribe an attack upon a federal administration as the lesser of two evils, there is no reason to think the motion-picture producers and exhibitors would not make the attack. When Upton Sinclair's entrance into the California race for governor forced the film industry to choose between becoming active politically or facing the possibility of higher taxes, the industry did not hesitate

<sup>22</sup> The legal aspects of radio freedom until 1934 are summarized by Louis G. Caldwell, "Freedom of Speech and Radio Broadcasting," *Annals*, CLXXVII (January, 1935), 179. The practice of the Federal Radio Commission, forerunner of the new Federal Communications Commission, is discussed in E. Pendleton Herring, *Public Administration and the Public Interest* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1936), chap. x. Fear of censorship by the Commission will be found in Elisha Hanson, "Official Propaganda and the New Deal," *Annals*, CLXXIX (May, 1935), 176, and in H. A. Bellows, "Is Radio Censored?" *Harper's*, CLXXV (November, 1935), 697.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. "Hollywood has long marveled over the fact that the government or such agencies as the United States Chamber of Commerce have never sought a position in the films to air some theory, expand on some policy or give publicity to some crusade" (Douglas W. Churchill, "Hollywood on the Road," *New York Times*, March 21, 1937, sec. 11, p. 3). All references here to the movies must exclude special consideration of the newsreels. Valid data on the political bias and content of this important medium is almost entirely lacking, and the task of analysis of the reels is too great to attempt here (see Edgar Dale, "Need for Study of the Newsreels," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 3 [July, 1937], 122-25).

to enter politics at the danger of alienating large segments of audiences. Once in, it barred no holds, but, according to its critics, indulged in some audacious faking of newsreel shots.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, among criticisms of government publicity one would expect to find the complaints of opposing politicians who resent the fact that another party is in office. Thus after the Democratic victory of 1936, John Hamilton, chairman of the Republican National Committee, assigned his party's defeat to the prosperity of the country *and the propaganda issued by federal agencies during the preceding three years.*<sup>25</sup> The influence of such condemnations from the heat of party battle is doubtful, except in so far as it requires government publicity offices to spend time in defense, but campaign criticism and attacks from the opposition party between campaigns should be included in a catalogue of hostility to government publicity.

#### THE PLACE OF PUBLICITY IN REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

When considered by nonvituperative students of public administration, government publicity as a part of administrative public relations has more dignity. Most attention has been given to it in municipal government.<sup>26</sup> Within recent time the

<sup>24</sup> William J. Perlman (ed.), *The Movies on Trial* (New York: Macmillan, 1936); Upton Sinclair here tells his own story. See also *New York Times*, November 4, 1934; and Richard S. Ames, "The Screen Enters Politics," *Harper's*, CLXX (1935), 473.

In local affairs the converse of the film producers' potential political power would be the degree of political censorship which local governments might impose under the police power. In two decisions, *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio* (236 U.S. 234) and *Mutual Film Corporation v. Dodge, Governor of Kansas* (236 U.S. 248), the United States Supreme Court refused the movies freedom from prior regulation and classed them with other amusements rather than with the free press of the First Amendment. Since it would be impossible to define by statute the undesirable film, the Court pointed out that administrative discretion must be allowed. Hence, in local exercise of the police power administrative discretion, instead of constitutional immunity, is the protection against official censorship of films for political, as well as moral, content.

<sup>25</sup> *Washington Post*, February 17, 1937 (my italics).

<sup>26</sup> Herman C. Beyle, *Governmental Reporting in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928); Wylie Kirkpatrick, *Reporting Municipal Government* (Chicago: Public Administration Service); National Committee on Municipal



function has been approved, at least by implication in the approval of managed public relations, by writers concerned with government in general and not limited to municipal affairs.<sup>27</sup>

When publicity is projected against the larger screen of contemporary representative government, it must be justified (a) as not giving undue power to the executive branch in the formation of policy and (b) as serving the public with information that is useful in the deciding of public policy. The basic theoretical assumption of this study is that both of these justifications can be made for the present. The future will be considered in chapter ix.

The first justification is provided in the experience of representative countries with ever increasing responsibility attending the ever increasing functions (hence power) of the bureaucracy. The essential protection of the citizen from the bureaucrat lies not in tying the administrative hands by law but in seeing that a responsible person with the public interest first in his tradition is appointed bureaucrat. The real protection of individuals against oppressive administration, in other words, is in cultural factors, i.e., in the mores of bureaucratic service. Formal legal guards, in this reasoning, should be designed to establish a merit system of entrance to the public service and to maintain its integrity, to allow a broad opportunity for a career within the service, and to provide a system of adminis-

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Reporting, *Public Reporting* (New York: Municipal Administration Service); J. T. Barton, *Municipal Public Reporting in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas, 1936); Clarence E. Ridley, annual appraisals of municipal reports for the *National Municipal Review*. Various experiential accounts of publicity feats may be found in the files of *Public Management*, *American City*, or the journals of the state municipal leagues. Vermont has the promotion of good town reporting as a project of its state chamber of commerce (see James P. Taylor, "A Vermont Experiment," *School and Society*, Vol. LX, No. 1019 [July 7, 1934], and "Vermont Leads Maine and the Nation," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 2 [April, 1937], 104).

<sup>27</sup> See Marshall E. Dimock, *Modern Politics and Administration*, pp. 247-48, 281-85; and "Selling Public Enterprises to the Public," *National Municipal Review*, XXIII (December, 1934), 660-66; and Herring, *op. cit.*, chap. xxii. A department on government publicity, edited by Harold D. Lasswell, was included in the *Public Opinion Quarterly* from its inception in January, 1937.

trative courts which would relieve the responsible executive and the citizen of the archaic and irrelevant provisions of private law. But in any case, laws would be chiefly aids to administration and to the citizen, while the basic guaranty of citizens' rights would be the tradition and morale of public servants acting in the public interest for the sake of orderly freedom for the individual.<sup>28</sup>

Such a theory of administrative responsibility seems to fit the true condition of modern government better than a theory of forcing the bureaucracy into insignificance by law. The increasing power of the executive branch is indisputable. It is not due to wilful power-seeking by administrators but to the growing technical complexity of operating the social machinery. More and more social functions have to be turned over to the public agency because they are too essential and too complicated to be handled by individuals. Government requires more and more persons with specialized skills to perform its work. A computation from Leonard D. White's tables shows that the number of technical and professional experts in the federal civil service has increased tenfold in the thirty-five years from 1896 to 1931.<sup>29</sup> This growth cannot be stopped by law because it is imposed by technological developments in an age of power technology.<sup>30</sup>

Applied specifically to the publicity agents, this theory of administrative responsibility would mean that high standards of morale and a traditional devotion to the public interest offer protection against the misuse of publicity for antipublic ends.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. John M. Gaus, "The Responsibility of Public Administration" and "American Society and Public Administration," in John M. Gaus, Leonard D. White, and Marshall E. Dimock, *The Frontiers of Public Administration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936); Carl J. Friedrich and Taylor Cole, *Responsible Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932); Leonard D. White, *A Government Career Service* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935); F. M. Blachly and Miriam Oatman, *Administrative Legislation and Adjudication* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1934).

<sup>29</sup> Leonard D. White, *Trends in Public Administration* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1933), pp. 242-45, 268-82.

<sup>30</sup> W. F. Ogburn, *Social Change* (New York: Viking Press, 1930).

The publicity is here, and laws cannot stop it any more than laws can undo the significance of the executive function. The moral pressure of integrity within the bureaucracy and the general moral tonicity of the community at large will determine the ethics of use.

Regarding the second justification for government publicity, it is an axiom of democratic theory that citizens must have access to information about government and all its socio-economic implications. In this connection John Dewey writes:

There can be no public without full publicity in respect to all consequences which concern it. Whatever obstructs and restricts publicity, limits and distorts thinking on social affairs. Without freedom of expression, not even methods of social inquiry can be developed. For tools can be evolved and perfected only in operation; in application to observing, reporting and organizing actual subject-matter; and this application cannot occur save through free and systematic communication.<sup>31</sup>

In the ideal fulfilment of democracy, every adult citizen would hear all sides of every question which has to be settled. In man's present social condition, however, he could get all sides only by some miracle of becoming a superman, and most of his decisions are made from meager and frequently irrelevant information combined with prejudice. Government publicity only provides one aspect of the citizen's news. It makes no effort to give complete analyses of social dilemmas, but only enters the competition with other one-sided statements of events. In doing this, it conforms to the contemporary practice of representative government.<sup>32</sup>

Probably the best argument for the government publicist, in fact, is that he is essential to even the minimum adequate coverage of events in Washington. The glut of occurrences

<sup>31</sup> *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1927), p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> It is not the purpose here to consider the possibility that government might properly acquire the function of assembling, condensing, and presenting all the information on controversial social subjects, thus escaping the present bias of media of communication in favor of commercial interests. Such an argument would assume that government could state fairly all aspects of a subject and need not inevitably use its power to repress controversy as news bureaus in totalitarian states have done.

each day in the vast and chaotic web of federal administration simply could not be followed by newspaper staffs unless they were enlarged by many times their present size. The scheme of letting government agents gather the news from scattered sources and leaving the reporter to serve as a selector of items is the economical one for newspapers. One federal publicity agent is convinced that the work of his office in gathering news from only one departmental building saves each newspaper or news service ten reporters.<sup>33</sup> A critic of government publicists writes in qualification:

Able newspapermen are in charge of every department and agency. The press sheets are of great value, and rarely has any statement been disproved in fact. Newspaper bureaus in Washington could not, for example, have covered the multifarious open activities of the NRA code authorities without using the NRA press department as an auxiliary. There are not enough reporters in Washington to keep any one newspaper or press association in touch with all these matters.<sup>34</sup>

The government publicity man is a part of the machinery by which the citizen is given the miscellany of fact and opinion which constitutes his news. The press releases will, of course, refrain from criticism of the agency. It has long been the habit of officials to place the best possible light upon their own accomplishments. But short of falsification, such one-sidedness is not a damning practice in the present condition of informing citizens by competitive publicity from numerous sources. The publicists of other interests and opposition parties can be on the job to keep government publicists from dominating the field.

This is the setting, then, for the practice of federal administrative publicity. Hostile criticism has singled out this function for special attention. Some support of publicity has begun to appear among students of public administration, who see it as a proper practice in representative government. In a theoretical light, it is involved in the process of giving citizens information; and, considering the present operations of competitive pub-

<sup>33</sup> Personal interview, January 16, 1937.

<sup>34</sup> Krock, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

licity in democracy, it is not a dangerous threat to the practices of representative government.

The discussion to follow is divided into two major parts. Chapters ii-v are concerned with the way federal administrative publicity offices do their work—with how they plan their programs, what media they use, what subjects they treat, the way they get their releases into media, and what they can know about their results. Chapters vi and vii, the second major part, are concerned with how the offices are organized and staffed and with their place in the administrative structure. Chapter viii presents some conclusions from the descriptive data, and chapter ix returns to the theme of this first chapter and carries farther some questions raised by administrative publicity.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PUBLICITY PROGRAM

**A**MONG the craftsmen of publicity, thinking about a program falls instantly into five questions: What is the objective to be sought? What audience will be most effective in reaching it? How should the actual publicity be planned? What will the content be? What media should be used?<sup>1</sup> The answers to any of these will depend upon the answers to the others, for in fact the plotting of a publicity campaign is a simultaneous consideration of all aspects of the program. For purposes of discussion, however, the segments will be separated here, the first three to be treated in this chapter, and content and the use of media to be reserved for the following chapter.

#### OBJECTIVES

Roughly the objectives of federal administrative publicity offices fall into six main categories, though, as in all phases of publicity, hard and fast lines cannot be drawn, for overlapping will inevitably occur to some degree. The objectives are (1) to distribute publicity among or for the clients of the agency; (2) to catch and hold the attention of the large public; (3) to influence legislation; (4) to reply to attacks upon the agency; (5) to avoid publicity; and (6) to report, without particular aims, the routine news of government. No ranking is implied, for most of the agencies seek each of these objectives at one time or another. These objectives can be made clearer by illustration.

1. As an example of publicity among or for clients, it may be said that one of the most difficult publicity jobs in the whole of

<sup>1</sup> Edward L. Bernays, "Molding Public Opinion," *Annals*, CLXXIX (May, 1935), 85-87.

federal administration at the present writing is that of the Social Security Board in keeping its clients loyal during the first seven years of operation under the Act until the first benefits begin to be paid.<sup>2</sup> The Board entered a field of activity which was entirely unknown to the experience of most Americans as late as five years before the Act was adopted. It has to convince some 37,000,000 clients, who are new to insurance schemes, that they will profit by paying premiums for some time before they even begin to see their associates receive any benefits. After the payment of old age retirement benefits is started in 1942, the publicity task of the Board will continue in large part to be one of convincing new clients and of keeping old clients convinced during the changing attitudes of business cycles and wars.

Relief agencies, as another example, have the twofold task of maintaining the morale of men on "made work" and at the same time convincing private employers that these relief clients are not immoral merely because they have been on relief.<sup>3</sup> The Works Progress Administration can direct its efforts toward getting all possible data on the condition of relief workers, on their age, physical condition, experience, and skills acquired on W.P.A. jobs, and can attempt to dramatize this information as news in the hope that private employers will be freed of their prejudices against relief workers. At the same time it can tell its clients that the work they are doing is useful to the community and thus hope to maintain their morale.<sup>4</sup>

Similar problems of morale and prestige face the other relief agencies. Resettlement Administration as a part of its objec-

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview, February 15, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interviews, February 8, 1937.

<sup>4</sup> A pamphlet, *Our Job with the WPA*, was designed for this objective. Much of the newspaper publicity in localities is also directed toward the maintenance of morale. The New York City office of W.P.A. started a special campaign in the fall of 1938 for the dual objective of "building up a favorable opinion of W.P.A. job candidates among local employers and of 'selling the W.P.A. worker back to himself' in a way that will restore his morale and drive out the feeling of defeat" (*New York Times*, October 2, 1938, sec. 1, p. 1).

tive must insist again and again that depressed farmers have human dignity and that they will maintain themselves if given a chance on adequate soil.<sup>5</sup> The National Youth Administration and Emergency Conservation Work must attempt to keep their young clients persuaded that they are part of a hopeful society even though they are not offered a chance to work outside of semirelief employment. For Emergency Conservation Work the Motion Picture Division of the Department of Interior was established for the double purpose of making a record of the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps and of educating and inspiring the C.C.C. boys. The second purpose has been the more important of the two. The youth of the boys, their isolation in camps, and their status in supposedly temporary employment while subject to some of the same suspicion that attaches to W.P.A. relief workers made it especially important that publicity be used to maintain their morale.<sup>6</sup>

Another type of objective for publicity among clients is promoting the use of particular federal agencies. This is perhaps the dominant aim for such agencies as Rural Electrification Administration, Farm Credit Administration, and Federal Housing Administration. The publicity purpose of the first, in the words of its agent, is "to catalyze a latent demand for electricity and to create the active demand which would lead to the use of R.E.A. and to farm improvement."<sup>7</sup> The publicity problem was one of power load-building through stressing the numerous ways in which power could be used on the farm. Farm Credit Administration, likewise, had to establish contact with the farmers who needed to borrow money. After the money was placed, the second phase of the publicity program became the promotion of co-operatives and the stimulation of loyalty

<sup>5</sup> Personal interview, December 28, 1936. The unusual effectiveness of Resettlement photography is due to its emphasis on the "human element." Very few of its releases fail to make individual tenant farmers and their children poignant symbols for the whole of farm depletion.

<sup>6</sup> Personal interview, February 4, 1937.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interview, January 23, 1937.



among their members so that F.C.A. would be supported in good times in preparation for its usefulness in bad times.<sup>8</sup> The similar publicity program of Federal Housing Administration in advertising the joys of home-owning is familiar to all who were conscious of housing during the period of pump-priming in the Great Depression. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration also went through a period of persuading farmers to participate in its program, and the Resettlement Administration used some publicity to find takers for its rehabilitation loans. A new aspect of promoting use may soon appear if the United States Maritime Commission carries out its contemplated program of encouraging travel on American ships.<sup>9</sup>

2. At the other extreme from clients as audience, some agencies seek to maintain a general attitude, not in a distinct public, but in the vague collection of publics that comprise the great public. Some agencies have become so widely accepted and approved by tradition and accretion of publicity that they no longer need to seek original attention. Examples would be the Army and Navy or the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In the main these need only to organize the distribution of news upon request from media, and in so doing they may guide the publicity in a desired direction. Their effectiveness in creating new favorable attitudes while maintaining their prestige is, of course, greater than that of the less fortunate agencies which must seek approval. The power of such hardy institutions as the Army and the Navy, in fact, is the power of government itself. The publicity office merely has to ride the current of approval already prepared in the large public.

Now it should be said that all government publicity agents have the overall objective of getting approval from the large public. Some of them hope to achieve the end indirectly by the

<sup>8</sup> Personal interview, February 5, 1937. A third program phase which is not yet important but which may well become so during the upswing of the business cycle is the maintenance of a market in the *urban* public for the bonds and debentures which F.C.A. sells for rural loans.

<sup>9</sup> Letter, April 5, 1937.

attainment of some more specific objective. A minority, in addition to the giants mentioned above, have a stated policy of "influencing public opinion" in the mass. Thus the Food and Drug Administration has the somewhat futile task of warning the public against a harmful product when the Administration is powerless to seize the product. The difficulty of this is apparent in the hostility of advertising media to any type of consumer protection.<sup>10</sup> (And the newspaper and radio, which constitute with the movies the publicity media of large circulation, are both advertising media.) This means an approach to the mass audience as well as the appeal to special groups. Occasionally an agency which normally limits its approach to a selected audience will broaden its horizon for a special release. The National Resources Committee, which ordinarily counts its effective audience the small group which reads its reports plus the periodic readers of brief press summaries of the reports, sent to some 1,000 newspapers specialized reports on the work of their respective state planning boards. Once sent, however, this release was dropped, and no effort has ever been made to keep the work of the Committee before the general public by consecutive releases.<sup>11</sup> Emergency Conservation Work adds to its job of propagandizing the boys in camp occasional releases to "tell the public about the C.C.C."<sup>12</sup>

3. In the sense that all publicity has an indirect influence upon legislative decisions, all administrative publicity offices have the objective of affecting legislation. There are times as well when the direction of policy has been an immediate aim of deliberate publicity. An example was the effort of the Bureau of Narcotics to get a uniform law on narcotics adopted in state legislatures.<sup>13</sup> Another was the effort of Rural Electrification

<sup>10</sup> Ruth deForest Lamb, *The American Chamber of Horrors* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), pp. 22, 81-82, 179-80, 302-10.

<sup>11</sup> Personal interview, January 18, 1937.

<sup>12</sup> Personal interview, January 18, 1937.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings before a Sub-committee on Treasury Department Appropriation Bill for 1936* (74th Cong., 1st sess. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935]), p. 219.

Administration to thwart state legislation placing co-operatives under the same regulation as private utilities and thus forcing them to meet higher financial requirements in order to get loans.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most striking recent publicity for legislation was the campaign of the Food and Drug Administration for enactment of the Copeland bill. The campaign was relaxed, as mentioned before, when talk of causing a scene with the "gag law" was started, but at one stage the Food and Drug Administration was doing its best to get the more effective law adopted. It issued a mimeographed lecture, apparently directed to women's clubs, entitled "Consumer, Save Thyself"; a series of three statements entitled "Pros and Cons of the Proposed New Federal Food and Drugs Act"; a statement headed "Why We Need a New 'Pure Food Law' "; and a series on outstanding provisions of the proposed law with such subheadings as "Patent Medicine Lies Cost Human Lives," "Ballyhoo or Truth," "Drugs—Beneficial or Deadly," "Contraptions—or Cures?" "What Price Water," "Must the Housewife Beware?" "How Much Poison Is Poison?" and "Beauty-at-Cost." A book, *American Chamber of Horrors*, published by a commercial publisher (Farrar & Rinehart) in 1936, was written by the Chief Educational Officer of the Administration, Ruth deForest Lamb, and could be added to the list of pleading for the Copeland bill.

4. The use of administrative publicity to reply to attacks upon an agency, though listed as one objective of publicity, is filled always with the danger that replies will give just so much more publicity to the impelling attack. In the main government publicists have refrained from such tactics. When headline writers seized upon a suggestion in a report of the National Resources Committee that the United States might be organized by regions for the purpose of planning and distorted the meaning into an implication that the President was trying to "Hitlerize America" by setting up provinces, the Com-

<sup>14</sup> *Washington Post*, February 3, 1937, p. 10 and *Washington Daily News*, February 5, 1937, p. 2.

mittee's publicity office made no effort to refute the charge. The office's news release on the regional report had not stressed the proposal for regions. The newspaper correspondents had isolated this particular item from the report itself and had written their stories with relatively little distortion except for that involved in lifting one statement from context. The damage had been done by headline writers, and disputing headlines was even more uncertain in its consequences than disputing the story itself. A refutation might have kept the story alive for several days, while without notice it died after its first appearance. By good fortune, some degree of correction, though not in the press, was secured when Paramount Newsreel asked for a statement and the Secretary of the Interior gave a straight brief account of the report before the camera.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the National Labor Relations Board did not reply to attacks on the National Labor Relations Act when the air was filled with recriminations in the early days of the Act.<sup>16</sup>

The deliberate use of counterpublicity, on the other hand, has appeared, as might be expected, in those agencies which have been made the focal point of political attack on the Franklin Roosevelt administration. When the Republican party fired on the Social Security Act in the presidential campaign of 1936, the Social Security Board's publicity staff saw its job as "fighting dirty politics with administrative purity."<sup>17</sup> It met each misstatement with a factual analysis prepared, needless to say, at great expense of time on the part of the staff. The effectiveness of such a defense has not been determined. A record of percentage of criticisms in total clippings concerning the Social Security Act and its administration from October 1, 1936, to January 27, 1937, shows a sharp drop from 28.58 per cent in October, 1936, to 11.22 per cent in November and down

<sup>15</sup> Interview, January 18, 1937.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. National Labor Relations Board, *First Annual Report, for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1936* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Personal interview, February 11, 1937.

to 4.88 per cent in January, 1937.<sup>18</sup> The Democratic victory in early November had ended the major reason for the hostility, however, and the decline cannot be assigned with certainty to the counterpublicity.

When in the same campaign the Works Progress Administration was attacked in the major part of the American press, the agency's press section tried to combat those erroneous stories that had wide circulation, leaving the isolated local misstatements unnoticed because, as the press chief said, these stories were always "about W.P.A. in some other locality and never about the projects right at home where the people were helping pay for them and in the main approved of the way they were being handled."<sup>19</sup> A sample story of national circulation was the condemnation of W.P.A. for building a dog pound in Memphis, Tennessee. The press section finally met this with a release giving figures from the Public Health Service on the incidence of rabies in Shelby County (Memphis) and other reasons for the dog pound. In other cases, the press chief wrote or had agents visit reputable editors to give them W.P.A. facts, in the belief that an honest editor would rather tell both sides of a story than be misled into a misstatement. The more ardent defense by W.P.A. was presented by pamphlets and the radio, media which avoided the barrier of a hostile press.<sup>20</sup> Testifying before a House committee, Harry Hopkins, Works Progress Administrator, said:

We felt that the people were not getting any adequate or proper information as to the way our funds were being expended. We felt that they were not getting that from a large section of the press, and we knew that misstatements about it were constantly being made. Literature was printed—hundreds of thousands of copies—making misstatements about our work, and it seemed to us that it was a thing of such vital importance to the American people that to spend such a modest sum as this was al-

<sup>18</sup> From a chart supplied by the Informational Service, Social Security Board.

<sup>19</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937.

<sup>20</sup> The editorial bias of the press in the 1936 campaign is reviewed in the *New Republic*, XC, Part II (spec. sec.): "The Press and the Public" (March 17, 1937), 1163.

together appropriate. As a matter of fact, I have had no criticism of any kind except from some partisan source. Many people have indicated their appreciation of it, and have stated that they were glad to have it. They stated that they never knew before how W.P.A. was conducting its various activities. I think this is a proper function for a democracy, and that the people should know what is going on.<sup>21</sup>

The total cost of printing for W.P.A., including the cost of printing routine forms and regulations as well as publicity, rose in the period of the campaign from \$368,731 for the first six months of 1936 to \$666,846 for the last five months, July 1–December 1, 1936, during which time the campaign was under way. However, in the previous period of July 1, 1935, to January 1, 1936, the second half of a year without a national election, the cost had been \$505,856, almost as large as during the campaign period.<sup>22</sup> The extra cost of the campaign refutation, in other words, was not the full amount of the increase but an increase of \$160,990 over the comparable period of the preceding year. Mr. Hopkins, in addition, spared no words in a radio address concerning the attacks upon his agency. He cited hostile attacks and the attackers and refuted the charges and also proclaimed the good faith of his agency.<sup>23</sup>

Replies by administrative officials to attacks by members on the floor of Congress are another defensive use of publicity. As an example, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration issued on May 21, 22, and 29, 1937, in the usual form of press releases, copies of letters from H. R. Tolley, Administrator, to Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, Republican, refuting charges, which the Senator quoted on the floor of the Senate, that some phases of the soil-conservation program were a "sheer racket."

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Hearing before the Sub-committee of the Committee on Appropriations, in Charge of Deficiency Appropriations, First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937* (75th Cong. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937]), testimony of Harry Hopkins.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–15.

<sup>23</sup> Progressive National Committee supporting Franklin D. Roosevelt for president, "Dollars and Sense," a campaign radio address over Columbia Broadcasting System, October 9, 1936, published as a leaflet.

Mr. Tolley reported facts gathered on specific cases which had been alleged to represent loose administration and to imply dishonesty. The general import of the releases was that Senator Vandenberg had been guilty of relaying false information about A.A.A. About the same time Senator Harry F. Byrd, a dissident Democrat, asserted that expenditures on the Resettlement Administration's Shenandoah Park project were exorbitant. This time Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace wrote the Senator an open letter giving a figure for the project which was much less than the figure that Senator Byrd had quoted. The press received the letter, of course.<sup>24</sup>

A constant source of hostility which government publicity men must face is private business. Any federal agency operates with reference to private interests that control powerful weapons of counterpropaganda. Businessmen know that "government that is too good encourages popular reliance on government, which in turn might result in the increase of governmental regulation of business, and possibly in new forms of government ownership and operation."<sup>25</sup> They maintain a steady barrage of propaganda against governmental administration to convince the public that private administration is superior; they watch for any indication that the public administrator is not serving business; they continually tell each other through their own media of communication that government is incompetent and oppressive. When their attack is particularized against specific agencies of government, it falls most heavily on those which are competing with private enterprises.

This is particularly true in the field of finance where attack is directed more against such permanent banking agencies as Farm Credit Administration and Rural Electrification Admin-

<sup>24</sup> *New York Times*, May 27, 1937, p. 6; May 30, 1937, sec. 1, p. 3; sec. 4, p. 10.

Resettlement Administration had by this time been placed in the Department of Agriculture. Later its title was changed to Farm Security Administration. It is called Resettlement Administration throughout this study because it had that name at the time the data were gathered.

<sup>25</sup> Marshall E. Dimock, "Do Business Men Want Good Government?" *National Municipal Review*, XX, No. 1 (January, 1931), 34.

istration, which serve farmers, than toward the avowed business-serving banks such as Reconstruction Finance Corporation or the Federal Home Loan Bank System. Farm Credit Administration's publicity office attempts to correct misinformation whenever it is likely to have a noticeably detrimental effect upon loans.<sup>26</sup> Rural Electrification Administration has used its publicity to fight enemy-sponsored bills in state legislatures and to warn farmers' power co-operatives against the private-power publicity of the utilities. R.E.A. has utilized friendly groups, such as vocational teachers, agricultural extension workers, municipal electric plant advocates, and the co-operative clients of R.E.A.<sup>27</sup>

A relevant but slighter attack is laid by private business against the fact-finding and regulatory agencies. The sad plight of the Food and Drug Administration has been mentioned. The facts which it finds can rarely be published widely through the popular media because they offend advertisers. In another field, a disinterested discussion of diets for families of varying incomes can arouse such hostility from the interests whose commodities are not included that Congress will ask questions.<sup>28</sup> The regulatory boards and commissions can count numerous instances of attack. In general, publicity offices do not fight back against attacks on fact-finding and regulation. The pacification of enemies becomes here a large part of the total administrative policy, and publicity often is not as good a weapon as negotiation.

5. The avoidance of publicity as an objective of the publicity office may take the course of passively keeping quiet, or it may mean the deliberate withholding of news that media have located but cannot publish without confirmation by the source. A good example of the first course is the attempted silence of the Department of Labor concerning its handling of

<sup>26</sup> Personal interview, February 5, 1937.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview, January 23, 1937.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Report of the Director of Information, 1935* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935), p. 6.



controversial matters. "The immigration law is plain," said one official in illustration. "The Department has to enforce it. We are damned if we do and damned if we don't. We go ahead and enforce the law and make no effort to convince either side that one way or the other is right. No publicity program could be planned to make the administration any easier, so it is better to say nothing at all." Likewise in labor strikes, when the Department may receive many demands to do something to stop the strike, the best policy is to say nothing, for actually under present law the Department is powerless to force any compromise in a strike, and publicity to the effect would merely advertise the Department's impotence. By a policy of silence the Department occasionally can run a bluff on the warring factions because its true weakness is not emphasized.<sup>29</sup> In all such conditions the job of the publicity agent is to decide when silence is better than speech and to maintain a consistent publicity policy.

Deliberate withholding of news may be an objective when publicity would make the agency liable for damage to another person or institution or when publicity would handicap the work of officials. A city may be refused a loan by Public Works Administration because of unsound financial condition at the very time it is floating a bond issue. P.W.A. might incur responsibility for the failure of the bond issue if it announced the refusal of a loan. A contractor may have failed inadvertently on some phase of his contract and thus may technically be involved in serious legal difficulty while being innocent of any evil intention. The P.W.A. publicity office would withhold the story.<sup>30</sup>

The need for secrecy in some activities where advance publicity might spoil valuable preparation occurs in practically all fields of federal administration. It is most striking in police functions, and it is interesting that the publicity agents dealing with police have better rationalized their position on suppress-

<sup>29</sup> Personal interview, February 5, 1937.

<sup>30</sup> Personal interview, January 16, 1937.

sion than most others. An official in the Department of Justice thinks withholding is essential as an objective for his work because so much of the subject matter handled by lawyers and detectives must be kept secret. He cites as illustration a hypothetical case in which a reporter has a tip that a complaint had been filed against a corporation for violation of the anti-trust laws. At the time the Federal Bureau of Investigation might be investigating the corporation's practices, and publicity would prevent the Bureau from getting further evidence without additional trouble and delay. In case the investigators failed to get enough evidence to indict, the Department would then be guilty of publicizing the suspicion of the corporation when no grounds for suspicion existed. Even if the investigators had accumulated enough evidence to indict by the time the story was requested, secrecy is still demanded by the necessity of guarding evidence for its surprise effect on the opposition and its influence on court psychology at the time of hearing. This means, in such an agency as the Department of Justice, that persons unskilled in dealing with wily reporters cannot be allowed to speak for publication and that all news must be channeled through an experienced publicity agent.<sup>31</sup>

When the more subtle forms of withholding are considered, it is difficult to make a clear definition. Is it withholding when an official does not notify the press that he is doing something? Was President Franklin D. Roosevelt guilty of unethical "censorship" when he sent his Supreme Court message to Congress without forewarning the press and without even allowing any reporter to suspect that he was working on such a message? To the administrative official in certain circumstances, silence is wise policy. The very success of some program may depend upon it. The prestige of the agency when it has made a blunder in executing a policy may depend upon it. Without doubt, the job of the government publicity agent includes discreet silences as well as public announcements, though the specific instances of evading publicity are not known and would never be known

<sup>31</sup> Personal interview, February 2, 1937.

short of confidential disclosures by the persons involved. If the theory that government administration owes a special obligation to proclaim everything that it does is accepted, any evasion is questionable. In practice, however, the governmental agent discovers that the public official, even as the private, must say nothing about certain matters. He may not try to withhold news once the reporter is aware of it, but he prays earnestly that the reporter will not hear of harmful events.

6. This whole discussion of objectives constitutes abstraction from statements by practicing government publicity agents. No one office is limited to any one of these objectives; no office observes all these objectives at any one time; yet all offices at one time or another have need of seeking one or more. If any valid generalization can be made concerning the most common purpose of such a variegated practice as government publicity, it would be the simple one made by the publicity agents themselves, namely, that their job is to help news media get the news of what their agencies are doing. They are sincere in universally stating this as their primary reason for existence, and this simple purpose is in fact the most obvious single objective for most of the offices.

#### THE AUDIENCE

It is axiomatic in all forms of salesmanship that the salesman should know as much as possible about his prospective customer in order to apply the most persuasive pressures. This is true as well of publicity, which is related to salesmanship in that the publicity agent hopes to redirect the attitudes of his auditor toward an objective of the publicist's choice.

Efforts to eliminate the guesswork about audience tastes have extended farthest in commercial advertising where the profit motive demands economy, though in no case can it be said that scientific precision has been achieved.<sup>32</sup> Business research has used such devices as the house-to-house survey, the

<sup>32</sup> Leverett S. Lyon, "Advertising," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), I, 469.

telephone survey, random sampling of the public in stores, on elevated and subway trains, or the examination of radio fan mail as a clue to the attitudes of possible audiences. All these are rough indices of interest and choice. More exact devices, such as the Thurstone scale, have been too complex and difficult for advertisers to use widely.<sup>33</sup>

Among government publicity practices as well, attempts to analyze the audience have been of the roughest sort. Of the thirty-six offices which answered this question in the questionnaire, only one, the Federal Radio Project under the Office of Education, has ever made a survey of its "market" in the manner of advertising surveys. The typical federal publicity agent's knowledge of his audience, therefore, with the exception of slight aids to be described later, is limited to his intuition. Time after time in interviews the subject of audience analysis was dismissed with such statements as "We have had experience in newspaper work and know what the public is interested in" or "We send the stuff out blindly except when we have selected mailing lists." Several of the agents felt the need for audience research but had no time for it.

The selected mailing list is the most important of the exceptions to the general rule of completely intuitive planning for an audience. The list may be built from requests for information, or it may cover groups and individuals whose interests are allied to the work of the agency. Group interest on such a list must be assumed to be individual interest as well. In any event, however, the selected mailing list reaches only that audience which might normally be expected to know something of the work of the agency. Certainly, when the list is made up of persons who have requested the publicity, the agency is not reaching a potential source of new support. In terms of exact knowledge, furthermore, the assumption that members of a group category in a mailing list will have certain interests which the

<sup>33</sup> On the measurement of attitudes in general see the Bibliography in Harold D. Lasswell, Ralph D. Casey, and Bruce L. Smith, *Propaganda and Promotional Activities, an Annotated Bibliography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1935), Part VI.

publicist may approach is still an intuitive method of analyzing the audience.

Another slight attempt to conform to audience interest involves the rough analysis of mailed-in queries and the preparation of releases to answer the predominant questions. The Post Office Department receives hundreds of questions from school children on "how the mail is delivered." It can answer these with a pamphlet.<sup>34</sup> Such publications as *War on Crime* and *Fingerprints* were issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to answer uniform queries.<sup>35</sup>

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration should be mentioned for its special advantage in knowing its audience from direct experience. Contact with the audience is maintained in meetings to discuss proposed crop-adjustment programs, and any program finally adopted includes a consideration for the recommendations of the clients. The publicity office has an established rapport with this particular part of its audience, and the publicity problem becomes one not of selling the program to clients but one of explaining the program, and the interests and opinions of clients are ascertained in advance.<sup>36</sup> Some other officials similarly can feel that their audience groups are so uniform in attitudes that small question exists concerning their interests. This may be true especially of the conscious consumer who receives a rather standardized publicity diet from all the sources, both public and private, that appeal to him. The Food and Drug Administration or the

<sup>34</sup> Personal interview, February 2, 1937.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, *Department of Justice Appropriation Bill for 1936, Hearing before the Sub-committee of the House Committee on Appropriations* (74th Cong., 1st sess. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935]), p. 80 (testimony of J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Bureau of Investigation). *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*, a processed, illustrated pamphlet satisfies additional requests for general information about the Bureau (personal interview, February, 1937).

<sup>36</sup> Alfred D. Stedman, Assistant Administrator of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, "Informing the Public about the A.A.A." (paper read at a round table on public relations of federal administrative agencies at the annual convention of the American Political Science Association, December 27, 1934, in Chicago).

Consumers' Counsel of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration may have a fairly safe wager in directing their publicity toward the conscious consumer as a type who has gone through a known training in the subject of consuming foods and drugs.

A common practice is to "let the release determine the audience." Thus, e.g., when Resettlement Administration had a story of special interest to certain groups, it would try to reach those groups through their journals, usually, in the case of Resettlement Administration, periodicals in the field of labor, agriculture, or architecture.<sup>37</sup> Works Progress Administration also lets the content determine the audience, having decided the content by an analysis of the publicity needs of the agency rather than by discovering what the audience interest might be. The Social Security Board has made extensive use of pamphlets prepared by subject-matter divisions under the Social Security Act and therefore appropriate for audiences concerned with pensions, old age assistance, or social welfare.<sup>38</sup>

These attempts to isolate particular audience interests are, however, more the exception than the rule in government publicity. A common direction of publicity is to that amorphous "general public" or to some equally broad trade or interest group, but not necessarily a psychologically unified group, in the great society. Releases may be sent to an architects' magazine under the misguided notion that all architects think alike; copy may be directed to "the entire farming population" of the nation. In the light of precise analysis of the audience, this is a wasteful procedure, yet government publicity agents are not alone in following it. In fact, the techniques of precise analysis are still confined largely to the laboratory, and practitioners in all paid and unpaid publicity rely often upon intuitive judgment or very loose measurement in the preparation of their material.

<sup>37</sup> Personal interview, January 6, 1937.

<sup>38</sup> Personal interview, February 11, 1937.

## PLANNING THE PROGRAM

The publicist, when planning, is faced with deciding the program best suited to the chosen objectives and to the audience that is to be reached. He may elect a concentrated, speedily executed campaign on some single topic, designed to establish suddenly in the audience an orientation toward the objective. He may select a central theme and steadily play upon it for a longer period, to focus attention upon it by the force of repetition in the manner of much commercial advertising. Or he may consider his program to be merely one of giving publicity to a broad general subject and its agency whenever he can find something new to present. In this last type of program, the campaign aspect is discarded entirely and the publicity agent becomes primarily a reporter of miscellaneous events within his agency, his function as a publicizer being limited to the selection or suppression of news.

Among the federal offices which answered the questionnaire, a minority, seven in number, follow the plan of particularized campaigns concentrated on single topics. Seventeen build their publicity around a central theme over a longer period. Twenty-six follow the plan of "taking the breaks as they come," or, in other words, reporting miscellaneous events and data from research, either to perform their legal duty or to keep their agencies before the public. In some cases, of course, both or all three types of program will be adopted for various phases of the agency's program.

About the only safe generalization is that those agencies which plan campaigns either on single topics or on a central theme through a long period are predominantly engaged in providing services on a wide front directly to citizen-clients, while the agencies which limit their program to reporting miscellaneous events as they occur are predominantly research or regulatory in function and have usually a more restricted clientele. For example, Federal Housing Administration, with its objective the promotion of the use of its services to stimulate building, follows the plan of campaigns on single topics and

central themes. Similarly, Works Progress Administration, the Public Works Administration, Soil Conservation Service, and others plan deliberately to deliver certain news to their publics. The United States Tariff Commission, on the other hand, exemplifies the type of agency which uses its informational office to publicize the results of research or to announce applications for investigations.<sup>39</sup> The Interstate Commerce Commission likewise needs only to make available to the press copies of all documents, such as complaints, petitions, and applications, filed with the Commission.<sup>40</sup>

Judged by a standard of sophisticated publicity procedures, a question could be raised concerning the efficacy with which the agencies which purport to plan campaigns really do so. In some cases the agency may realize the need for a campaign on a single topic and yet may not have sufficient time to plan an economical expenditure of money and effort in a campaign. An illustration of this was the predicament of the Social Security Board's information office when it was attempting to prepare the public for the beginning of operation under the Act. A wide-scale publicity campaign on the one topic of the method of enrolling clients was necessary. The audience in this instance was defined as the 26,000,000 workers and employers who would have to conform to the method chosen. While the information office knew without question what its campaign topic should be, what its audience would be, and what an enormous technical task would be met, the office could not make its plans until the Board itself had chosen a method of enrolment from among the several under consideration. The outcome was a last-minute decision by the Board to enrol through forms distributed by the post office, and consequently a last-minute plan by the information office of a whirlwind campaign was the only choice.

Another disrupting factor in economical planning may be the appearance of unanticipated political attacks upon an adminis-

<sup>39</sup> Letter, March 31, 1937.

<sup>40</sup> Letter, March 27, 1937.



trative function and agency. The Social Security Board, again, was unable to follow unhindered a prearranged plan of campaign on the specific topic of inaugurating the operation of the Social Security Act because the Republican party chose the Act as one point of attack upon the Democratic administration in the presidential election campaign of 1936. At the very time the information office might have been concentrating on its initiatory program, it had to devote its major attention to answering attacks. A strict interpretation of the role of an administrative agency might say that the Social Security Board should have remained aloof and left the campaign of defense and counterattack to the publicity forces of the Democratic party, which were, as a matter of fact, also fighting back on this topic. The Social Security Board, however, decided that the attack from a hostile party endangered the whole future ease of administering the Act. Half-truths about the tax provisions of the Act were inserted in pay envelopes, and notices simulating official statements by the Board itself were posted on factory bulletin boards. A Republican speaker displayed a chain and "dog tag" and charged that the Board would require each worker to wear one around his neck. If these representations had been accepted by even a minority of the then prospective clients, the Board would have faced the hopeless administrative condition of hostility rather than support from its clientele.<sup>41</sup> An administrative agency cannot be immune to political attacks upon it. Such attacks will disrupt a strictly defined plan for a publicity campaign.

There are times when the policy of planning a campaign with a charted course of development and the policy of taking advantage of news events as they occur will merge in practice. Works Progress Administration may be in the midst of a campaign on the topic of the employability of relief workers when floods submerge the Ohio River Valley and provide an oppor-

<sup>41</sup> Personal interview, February 11, 1937. The Republican attacks were reported extensively in the *New York Times* and in the metropolitan press generally during October and early November, 1936.

tunity to play up the repair work of the agency. Soil Conservation Service may be distracted momentarily from an ordered campaign on strip-cropping to concentrate on the floods as examples of the general need for soil conservation. Resettlement Administration may be emphasizing the availability of rehabilitation loans when drought in the Great Plains becomes the big news nationally and affords the agency a prime opportunity to distribute the general message of land use. Such unanticipated opportunities are always taken by the federal offices, and the net result is that the major objective of the agency is publicized, although a specific campaign within the broad publicity program may be interrupted.

The ease of "taking the breaks" will depend in all agencies upon the general news situation of the moment and upon the skill with which the publicity agents can perceive news possibilities. Its ease will vary also with agencies according to the different degrees of general news interest in their activities. By "news situation" is meant roughly the prevailing focus of attention in the transient period in which a particular publicity release is made. If a famous child has just been kidnapped or a pretty model has been murdered, a release from the Bureau of Mines will hardly make page one or get much of a radio and newsreel audience; but if a mine disaster is in the top headlines, a release from the Bureau will have a preferred value. The best the publicity agent can do toward assuring a receptive situation for his news is to keep up to the minute on what is happening and thus to avoid wasting his ammunition when it would have no target. Teletype news services are found in several publicity offices (e.g., Public Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, the White House) to keep the information staffs informed constantly of what is breaking in the news.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> These news ticker services also keep the publicity and nonpublicity staffs informed of possible attacks upon the agency and allow time for replies or counterattacks to be made simultaneously with the attack, both appearing in the same edition of the newspaper.

The varying skill of publicity agents in perceiving possible news stories is related to a program of reporting events as they occur. The "good" publicity agent, like the good reporter, is one who can see news. Since, however, the qualifications of personnel will be considered in chapter vii, the only point here is to suggest that no agency should employ an agent who cannot see news.

"Taking the breaks" in news involves the spectacular qualities of activities, and these qualities are beyond control, short of creating spectacles which as yet is not practiced by government publicity offices. The most glamorous news comes, of course, from the President himself. His daily goings and comings, his most trivial witticism, his family affairs, and his occupations as the "boss" of the United States of America, including the Democratic party, command assured space in any of the publicity media. He personifies the government. Some other agencies secure publicity through the nature of their activities and therefore become good news because they have by function secured public attention. Thus the arts project under Works Progress Administration through its own activities reached 50,000,000 people in its audiences for music, not counting radio listeners, during the first fifteen months of operation; 16,000,000 in its theater audiences in thirty states during the first year; and an unrecorded number of people interested in painting through its art galleries and centers and classes in art. Such activities drew, said one observer, "a greater response than anything the government has done in generations."<sup>43</sup> The general relief program also reached a large audience through its large number of employees and their personal connections and through the visible physical changes made in parks and buildings and streams and roads throughout the land. It was good news accordingly, because people were interested from firsthand participation or observation.

Some other agencies command attention from selected audiences through the sheer informational value of their releases.

<sup>43</sup> "Unemployed Arts," *Fortune*, XV, No. 5 (June, 1937), 111.

One such is the Securities and Exchange Commission, whose dispatches fill the financial pages of the metropolitan press. The news in this case is a record of stock registrations, hearings, salaries and stock ownership of officers of corporations, and rules and regulations of the Commission. The same informational value applies to the financial news releases from the Federal Reserve Board or the routine business of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Other agencies of similar functions share this advantage in having an audience for their releases.

Among the agencies that must make more effort to reach a wider audience the general policy is to take advantage of every routine and every extraordinary development for producing news. The routine may include monthly progress reports from which something of news value can be culled. It may be the letting of bids and contracts, the beginning or ending of construction, or ceremonies of building dedication.<sup>44</sup> It may be, in the case of Farm Credit Administration, the actions of the board of directors, the annual meeting of stockholders, the election of officers, sales of farms, or variations in interest rates.<sup>45</sup> It may be any of the numerous activities carried on as routine by the various agencies. The skilled publicity agent can discern news of interest in almost any event.

Natural catastrophes probably give the publicity agent his best news in the realm of sources outside of routine. Practically every motion-picture camera crew in the federal government was busy in the flood area in early 1937, gathering shots to be used in releases on the importance of the work of the various agencies participating in flood activities. The Washington publicity offices of each of the agencies and the regional

<sup>44</sup> "Remarks of Michael W. Straus, Assistant to the Administrator, on 'Publicity Policy' before the State Directors," Public Works Administration (file No. P.W. 49818, address delivered *ca.* February 14, 1936).

<sup>45</sup> "Remarks by E. B. Reid, Director of Information, Farm Credit Administration, before the Joint Meeting of National Farm Loan Association and Production Credit Association Officials at Louisville, November 6, 1935" (from the files of the Information Division, Farm Credit Administration).

offices of some were steadily getting out news of the services being performed. Some took advantage of the opportunity for urging land-use planning and conservation. Again, when a special committee to consider the problem of the Great Plains made a tour of the drought region in order to get a visual impression of the country, the various land-use agencies could play up the publicity value of the tour for all it was worth. Even routine visits make good news. When the President visited Greenbelt, a suburban housing project of Resettlement Administration, the publicity agent could be assured of space, with pictures, in many newspapers and good coverage in the newsreels. If an official from Washington visits a local office of any federal agency, the event is news in the local community, and if the official is not too weary he may kill two birds by speaking to a businessmen's luncheon club and having his speech reported in the newspapers. Anything that is of interest is, in short, grist for the publicity mill. The publicity agent must see the news occurring within his domain, both in the catastrophic spectacles and in the pedestrian progression of day-by-day work.

#### PROCEDURE IN PLAN AND EXECUTION

The fact that emphasis is given in the majority of federal publicity offices to reporting events as they occur and that, even when campaigns are planned, the planning is not usually complex means that the usual formalities of procedure are lacking. The questionnaires show, for instance, that only four out of thirty-seven publicity staffs hold weekly meetings. Nine have occasional meetings on call, and twenty-four hold none at all. In some of the twenty-four the staff is so small that a formal meeting would be ludicrous, but in others an established time for talking over past and future activities would be legitimate. Resettlement Administration, one of the four holding a weekly staff meeting, has found it useful in co-ordinating the work of various offices within the division, in criticizing proposed releases, in developing new ideas for releases. Without

the staff meeting as a device for formalizing ideas and initiative, publicity agents in the larger staffs work generally in touseled informality.

The control of money is closely tied to the control of planning. If the publicity office has unhindered charge of its appropriation after the lump-sum allotment to information has been made, its program can be planned with more certainty of conforming to available funds. Nineteen, or about half, of the publicity heads who replied to a question on this subject had control of their funds to make allocations for uses within their offices after general appropriations for information had been made. Fifteen were subject to authority outside the information office for allocations within the office. Within the offices which had control or which could recommend allocations of the general appropriations, decisions on allocations were made about equally by the director alone and by the director in conference with individual chiefs of sections.

Another significant factor in planning and executing a program, especially for other media than the newspaper, is the availability of technical skill and facilities. One agency may be destitute so far as using the radio or motion picture is concerned because it lacks the money to purchase the skills, while another may double or triple its audience because it has access to the necessary technicians.

In a modest program, *publications* are likely to be used, in contrast to the more elaborate programs which use the radio, the motion picture, and exhibits as well. Printing, whether it be a leaflet or a book, requires skill in making a layout, i.e., in selecting type, placing illustrations, breaking the type-matter by headlines, and choosing the format. Most offices might be expected to have available someone who knows printing design and who can make charts and drawings. Twenty-three of the twenty-nine offices which answered the question and use layouts meet this minimum expectation by having layouts made by their own staffs. Eight, including some of those with layout designers on their own staffs, can use the skill of other divisions

of their agencies. Four rely upon designers in the Government Printing Office. Seven never require layouts at all. When drawings, including graphs and pictographs (pictorial statistics), are needed for publication, only ten offices can have these made by their own staffs. Nineteen, however, can get the work done by other offices within their agencies. Ten never use drawings. Posters can be designed by the staffs of ten offices, while six can get poster-work in other offices of their agencies. Eighteen never use posters.

These figures represent only the practice, obviously, and do not evaluate the quality of the "art work" performed. In some instances, probably, the mediocre quality of homemade illustrations is more liability than asset in the agency's publicity. In such case a wiser policy would be to call in a special consultant to design the graphic presentation and to pay him on a per diem basis. The design of pictographs and graphic presentation generally requires rare skill, not easily available; amateurs can misuse the techniques with results both comical and confusing.

Certainly the most outstanding examples of the effective use of graphic presentation in government publications are the work of specialists hired on a consulting basis. Beginning with the *Report of the Mississippi Valley Committee, October, 1934*, Mr. Rudolf Modley's Pictorial Statistics, Inc., added a unique quality to a series of federal publications, including *On Relief* for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, 1935, the *Report of the Great Plains Drought Committee, 1936*, *Electric Power on the Farm* for the Rural Electrification Administration, 1936, *Little Waters* by Soil Conservation Service and other agencies, 1936, and *Youth on Relief* for the Works Progress Administration, 1936.<sup>46</sup> Mr. Modley is the foremost exponent in the United States of the theories and techniques developed first at the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in Vienna in the 1920's, although he does not join Dr. Otto Neurath, the

<sup>46</sup> All published by the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., in the years designated. See Rudolf Modley, *How To Use Pictorial Statistics* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), pp. 161-66.

## THE PUBLICITY PROGRAM

father of modern pictographs, in stressing an international picture language.<sup>47</sup>

Once the layout is designed, its satisfactory transfer to publication in the Government Printing Office seems assured so long as the publication is not among those with format prescribed in regulations and so long as the Printing Office has the means for executing the layout. The designer for Works Progress Administration publications has never met opposition from the Printing Office on any effort to use the latest and sometimes the more expensive means of effective printing.<sup>48</sup> The Public Printer in his annual report for 1936 quotes praise from the Rural Electrification Administration and the *New York Times* on the printing of *Little Waters*; from the Public Works Administration for *The Story of PWA in Pictures*; from the Tennessee Valley Authority for *Soil*, a picture booklet on soil conservation; and from the vice-chairman of the National Resources Committee for *Regional Planning in the Pacific North West*.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> For a full discussion of pictorial statistics see Modley, *op. cit.*, and Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language, the First Rules of Isotype* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1936). Both these books are profusely illustrated with examples of good and bad pictographs. The master-work so far of graphic presentation of economic, social, and geographical facts is Neurath, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft, bildstatistisches Elementarwerk* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1930), a collection of 100 charts.

Modley (*op. cit.*, p. 162) gives credit to Morris L. Cooke, chairman of the Mississippi Valley Committee, the Great Plains Drought Committee, and one-time Rural Electrification Administrator for first sponsoring the use of modern pictorial statistics in federal publication in the *Report of the Mississippi Valley Committee, 1934*. Mr. Cooke has a long and consistent record of interest in good administrative publicity. On the basis of experience as a city administrator, he gave, back in 1919, one of the most pertinent discussions of administrative publicity on record (see his *Our Cities Awake* [New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1919]).

<sup>48</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937. Marginal headings are used in Harry L. Hopkins, *The Realities of Unemployment*; half-tones are bled (i.e., printed without an outer margin) in leaflets entitled *Work Pays America* and *Making Aviation Safer in America* and in the most pictorial of all W.P.A. publications, *Jobs* (1936). All are published by the Government Printing Office.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Public Printer, *1936 Annual Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 16-19.



When special skills are needed to use the so-called technical media, such as exhibit displays, film-strips, motion pictures, photographs, or radio drama, federal publicity offices follow a variety of practices.

In the field of *exhibits*, the Department of Interior has a staff competent to prepare models and dioramas, though in some cases too little time is allowed for the preparation and the exhibit has to be ordered by contract.<sup>50</sup> Works Progress Administration uses photomurals to a large extent. Once the enlargements have been made, one man on the staff can do the lettering and assemble the murals. The National Park Service has museum experts in its regional headquarters to supervise the making of exhibits.<sup>51</sup> Resettlement Administration has a committee on exhibits with a technical subcommittee to coordinate the work of the Special Skills Division (art work) and the Historical Section of the Information Division (photography).<sup>52</sup> Some other agencies, on the other hand, purchase models by contract. J. J. Wenner of New York made for the Rural Electrification Administration's exhibit at the Great Lakes Exposition in Cleveland a model of an electrified farm at the reported cost of \$2,000 and for the Soil Conservation Service a model of a farm under erosion control for a reported cost of \$5,000.<sup>53</sup>

Rural Electrification Administration assembles and prints its own *film-strips* in the Exhibits Section.<sup>54</sup> The Department of Agriculture's Visual Instruction Service assembles and edits strip series for the various bureaus in the Department, but has the film-strip negative and the positives made by a private contractor.<sup>55</sup> Resettlement Administration also combines its

<sup>50</sup> Personal interview, February 4, 1937.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Department of Interior, *Annual Report, 1934* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), p. 181.

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Resettlement Administration, *First Annual Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), p. 99.

<sup>53</sup> "Off the Record—in Miniature," *Fortune*, XV, No. 4 (April, 1937), 22.

<sup>54</sup> Personal interview, January 23, 1937.

<sup>55</sup> "Outline of Organization, Policies, and Procedures Governing Information Activities of the Soil Conservation Service," unpublished, in files of the Service. Undated but in effect in February, 1937.

own technical work with that of a private contractor. The Information Division plans, assembles, and edits the picture series, but a private contractor does the laboratory work. A representative of the Division selects the music and delivers the vocal comment for the accompanying sound.<sup>56</sup>

A lack of uniformity is again typical in the technical preparation of *motion pictures* by the publicity offices. Some agencies which use movies to a significant extent leave the control of production in the hands of the information offices, and in these the technical work is done by contract. When Works Progress Administration decided to make motion pictures for the public, it gave the work of taking fresh shots and of developing and cutting to the Pathé company. Since the publicity films are in newsreel form, merely showing sequences of the activities of W.P.A., the scenario could be written by a member of the information staff who had had no experience with motion-picture production. In writing the script, he could call upon Pathé for advice on technical limitations and for predictions of what a finished shot would be like.<sup>57</sup> Social Security Board also has scenarios written in the information office but has the technical production handled by Pathé.<sup>58</sup>

Resettlement Administration, which produced in "The Plow That Broke the Plains," its first film, and in "The River," its second, the most successful government publicity films in terms of reception by critics, went farther than the other two agencies in actually making its films. It did its own research, and it hired a scenarist-director and three cameramen on a per diem basis. It commissioned a composer to write the musical score. It then allowed the specialists to follow the production from beginning to end, although the laboratory work of developing, printing, and recording the sound was done under contract with private companies. The secret of success lay in the quality of the personnel hired by Resettlement Administration, and experience in this case is no guaranty that the

<sup>56</sup> Personal interview, January 5, 1937.

<sup>57</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937.

<sup>58</sup> Press release No. 321, February 15, 1937, Social Security Board.

method is in itself assurance of success. The scenarist-director was Pare Lorentz, a long-time student of the cinema and a critic who had been motion-picture editor of *McCall's* and *Judge* and who had written a book about the movies. The composer was Virgil Thomson, who had written the music for Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts* and who was established among the better-known modern composers. The cameramen for "The Plow" were Ralph Steiner, who had been recognized as one of the best American photographers; Paul Strand, who had been head of the cinematographic division of the Department of Education in Mexico and whose still-photographs had been exhibited among the best of art photographs in the world; and Leo T. Hurwitz, who had made documentary movies of the American scene. "The River" was photographed by Stacy Woodard, Floyd Crosby, and Willard Van Dyke, all of whom had shown exceptional camera skill and artistic understanding. The musical score was played by musicians from the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic Symphony orchestras under the direction of Alexander Smallens, a widely recognized conductor.<sup>59</sup>

Other information offices which use motion pictures rely upon other divisions of their agencies for the technical production. The Interior Department's bureau offices may call upon the Division of Motion Pictures, which will lend its films designed for the entertainment and education of the Civilian Conservation Corps. This division has a staff of eight or nine in the laboratory, two cameramen in the field, and three editors writing scenarios and cutting film. Officials here believe the advantages of having complete control over the entire production outweigh any consideration of hiring the technical work.<sup>60</sup> The Army and Navy departments may call upon their motion-picture crews in the Signal Corps and the Intelligence

<sup>59</sup> The Resettlement Administration Division of Information has prepared leaflets and press material on both "The Plow" and "The River" giving relevant information on the productions.

<sup>60</sup> Personal interview, February 4, 1937.

Service. When a bureau of the Department of Agriculture desires an informational film, it may request the Office of Motion Pictures in the Extension Service to make it. All these motion-picture divisions maintain technical staffs for the entire production. All of them emphasize the educational film approach rather than an artistic, dramatic approach to the subject matter. It can be predicted that no "Plow That Broke the Plains" is apt to come from any of them.

All the publicity officials who release *photographs* have available either in their own offices or in other offices within their agencies technicians with sufficient competence to take and develop clear pictures. A more important question is whether they have the type of competence needed to take good reportorial pictures in terms of subject matter and interpretation. The general field of photography in its present stage of development throughout the world appears to present a variety of practitioners with a variety of aims. On the one extreme are the experts whose only concern is the physics of lenses and the chemistry of developers, who show no more imagination in the subject matter of their pictures than the most immature Sunday afternoon snapshoter. Somewhere in the middle area would be the news photographers who have blended a technical skill with an adaptation of newspaper values to a new medium. To these a picture must have a story in it, and their definition of a story is usually something that is happening or famous people who are near something that is happening. Far on the other side are the photographers who see pictures as studies in form, texture, and design and who may be just as pleased with an abstraction from a whole object as with the whole itself. The technical skill of these, needless to say, is highly developed because the artistic value of a photograph comes as much from the printing as from the camera work. Still another type of photographer, and one found widely in government service, stresses scientific accuracy in pictures at the expense of dramatic interest. He takes a picture of a field with a measuring stick in view to show the depth of erosion, and he is not concerned

with the possibilities for stirring people emotionally by pictures that suggest the tragedy of waste.<sup>61</sup>

The most competent photographer for publicity service combines technical competence, a desire for accuracy, artistic good taste, and imagination enough to see the potential dramatic interest in a scene. He is a type that is only now emerging with the approaching maturity of photography. Several government publicity offices have one or two of these men by accident. On occasion a photographer in a scientific service will develop a sensitivity to publicity values and will spot good pictures among his scientific camera records. A notable example of this was a striking pattern design caught by a camera of Soil Conservation Service in an air-view of a terraced and strip-cropped field.<sup>62</sup> Sometimes newspaper photographers will develop the imagination prerequisite to taking exceptional and therefore newsworthy pictures without going to the extreme of overdramatizing or sentimentalizing. There is no assurance of uniformity, however, in the direction of growth for photographers from either of these backgrounds.

Resettlement Administration, in its emphasis upon the technical media, has gone farther than any other federal publicity office to find and develop a type of photographer suited to informational work. Roy Stryker, the Chief of the Historical Section of the Information Division, had been interested in visual education at Columbia University, where he taught economics. When he entered Resettlement Administration, he decided the first need in photography, after an analysis of the records and publicity problem, was a corps of photographers who had either shown a special ability to perceive good pictures of a social documentary nature or who had been uncontaminated by any previous specialization. He expected to get his best from among young and pliable photographers. He found

<sup>61</sup> These observations are based on various talks with publicity men, newspapermen, and photographers.

<sup>62</sup> The pictures of this field were distributed to newspapers by Associated Press Wirephoto Service (see, e.g., *Washington Post*, January 12, 1937, p. 8).

the first one in the student body of Columbia University. Another was an artist who had worked at painting as much as at photography. A third had been taking pictures for another federal relief agency and had shown by some of her published prints that she had social awareness. Another was a newspaper reporter (not news photographer) who had been doing amateur photography. Only one had been doing the orthodox type of government photography in a scientific agency. With this small staff the Resettlement Administration began portraying the depressed farmers of the land, the miserable homes and failing vehicles in which they lived, the rugged honesty of relief clients, and the hopefulness of federal rehabilitation. This was the sort of technical skill which went beyond mere competence in developing, printing, and enlarging, into the realm of pictorial documentation of an aspect of American life.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, there is no certain prescription which all other informational offices can follow to get the identical qualities in its staff photographers.

In using the *radio*, government agencies are spared the re-

<sup>63</sup> Some examples of Resettlement Administration (Farm Security) photography have been chosen for illustrations in this book. In published form it can be seen in many newspapers and periodicals whenever tenant farming, dust storms, or migrant workers are under discussion. For examples, see *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 1937; *Look*, I, No. 3 (March, 1937), 18; *Chicago Sunday Times*, February 14, 1937. The published annuals of outstanding American photography usually have several pictures by Resettlement photographers. See *U.S. Camera*, 1937 (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1937) for prints by Theodor Jung, p. 139; by Dorothea Lange, p. 51; and by Arthur Rothstein, pp. 52, 187, 193; *Leica Annual*, 1937 (New York: Galleon Press, Inc., 1937) for prints by Theodor Jung, pp. 100, 102; by Arthur Rothstein, pp. 96, 98, 99, 101; and by Ben Shahn, p. 97. The most noteworthy professional recognition so far came in late 1938 with the inclusion of a special section of Resettlement photographs in *U.S. Camera* 1939, accompanied by comments from citizens who had seen the pictures at the International Photographic Exhibition in New York. Edward Steichen wrote the special introduction to the section, praising the pictures for their story-telling power. "If you are the kind of rugged individualist who likes to say 'Am I my brother's keeper?'" he wrote, "don't look at these pictures—they may change your mind" (*ibid.*, p. 44).

Archibald MacLeish has written a poem to accompany some eighty photographs, most of them by Resettlement photographers (see his *Land of the Free* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1938]).

sponsibility for technical execution of the actual broadcast because the sole outlet on a large scale is through privately owned stations and networks. The task of preparing programs that will attract and hold listeners and at the same time convey the message desired is, however, one that many government offices face. Two degrees of competence are called for. In one type of program, any person experienced in writing advertising or news copy can learn to write the newsscript or promotion fillin that is sent out to local stations in the hope that announcers will use the copy in spare moments. Several offices use this type of radio material. Similarly, the radio address can be prepared after some study of radio technique by any writer who has written speeches for other occasions.

In the case of the radio drama, which is being used more and more by government agencies, a higher quality of skill is demanded both in the writing and in the performing. Resettlement Administration offers a good example of the preparation of electrical transcription dramas for distribution on records to local broadcasting stations. The same technique could be used, of course, for a direct broadcast. The Resettlement Information Division recognized first that amateurs could not write the quality of sketch it wanted, so it gave its ideas for content to a free-lance professional writer who worked on a piece basis. His script was approved in each instance by the Information Division and was then sent to New York for performance by a group of professional radio actors for recording. The programs made in this way were news-dramas in the fashion of the radio "March of Time" which had already attracted a large audience under commercial sponsorship.<sup>64</sup> Within the Information Division an experienced radio executive spent full time arranging and supervising the professional production of the Resettlement programs.

Programs issued by the Office of Education's Federal Radio Project, which verge on publicity, are prepared after extensive research by professional writers and technical advisers, some of

<sup>64</sup> Personal interview, January 5, 1937.

whom were borrowed by the Project from the major broadcasting companies. Committees of experts on the subjects treated check each script for accuracy of statement. The performances in New York—for these are direct broadcasts and not electrical transcriptions—are handled by actors from the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration with professional skill. The music is frequently written especially for a program and when not written is always selected by a professional musical director.<sup>65</sup>

A publicity program, to return to the opening paragraph of this chapter, involves a choice of objectives, a choice of audience, a plan of campaign, and a choice of media and content. The federal offices have a variety of objectives, some demanding aggressive, some passive, and some defensive publicity. They are greatly handicapped in choosing the most effective audience because they have no accurate devices for ascertaining audience interests. They are able, on the whole, to plan any program that requires only the use of printed media because they have access to the technical skills required for printing design, though the quality of such design is by no means uniform. Only a few, however, can plan to use the best photography, motion pictures, and radio drama because these media demand skill that goes beyond mere technique into the realm of artistic imagination, and persons with these special skills are still in a minority in government publicity work, as well as rare in the population as a whole. The choice of media and content as a factor in publicity programs will be considered in the next chapter.

<sup>65</sup> *Washington Post*, March 21, 1937.



## CHAPTER III

### MEDIA CHOSEN AND CONTENT

#### MEDIA AVAILABLE

IN ONE way or another the federal administrative agencies share in the occasional use of all the myriad techniques of communication. Martial music played on a village mall will indirectly enhance the prestige of the War and Navy departments. The uniformed postman struggling cheerfully under a burden of Christmas mail makes the lot of the post office easier in his small sector. Ceremonies at the laying of cornerstones or the opening of new bridges add laurels to the public-works agencies, while public buildings themselves are far-scattered reminders of the ubiquitous activities of government. Newspapers, magazines, books, movies, radio, the stage, paintings, songs, posters, exhibits, gossip, speeches—all deal with the news of government from time to time.

But to say that government has consciously tried to deliver its publicity by all these media would be to exaggerate its initiative. For one thing, the use of some media has fallen more into the hands of nonpublicity officers than of publicity officials. Advertising is planned and purchased not by the publicity office but by procurement offices or, in the case of the armed services, by recruiting offices. The Federal Theatre's "Living Newspaper" treatment of the case for federal power control or the need for federal housing aid may be very effective New Deal publicity, though not conceived or executed in the publicity office of Works Progress Administration. Mural paintings in public buildings often present the work of governmental agencies, yet the publicity office is not consulted in their preparation.<sup>1</sup>

The publicity office as a distinct entity chooses the media for

<sup>1</sup> Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson, *Art in Federal Buildings* (Washington: Art in Federal Buildings, Inc., 1936), Vol. I: *Mural Designs 1934-1936*.



MIGRANTS, TWO FAMILIES AND TWO CARS FROM MISSOURI, LOOK-  
ING FOR WORK IN THE PEA FIELDS

Their home on wheels, often without gasoline, these agricultural workers help each other to the next place of hope for work. They are a reason for federal rehabilitation. (Photo by Dorothea Lange.)



its publicity according to the prevailing conception of the scope of its function, and so far in the federal government no agency has seen the publicity function in sufficient breadth to include the use of many of the available media. The limitless reaches of civic education by means of all forms of communication, so thoroughly analyzed by Charles E. Merriam and his colleagues, are no part of the present consciousness of the federal offices.<sup>2</sup> This consideration of media, then, is limited to those which are available within the restricted scope of practice by the publicity office.

The most available media and those which cost the least to use are the ones directed to a mass audience. On occasion exceptional good fortune will develop a story so big that an agent can see his release simultaneously in the newspapers, in some magazines, in the newsreels, and can hear it delivered by news commentators over the radio all within a week. A cabinet officer may have something so important to say that his publicity officer can get the maximum of space. Or the President in his near-monopoly of the spotlight may discuss the work of a particular agency and thereby give it more publicity than it could ever obtain by itself. These, however, are the exceptional stories. In actual practice few government publicity agents, short of the President's own, ever break into all four media at the same time. The normal day-to-day lot of the administrative publicity official is to get into one medium at a time and not with uniform success in any one.

In addition to these inexpensive and massive ways of reaching the great audience the federal publicists have available such other media as film-strips, exhibits, periodicals, books, pamphlets, speeches, and posters.<sup>3</sup> Each of the media is subject to degrees of usage roughly within the following framework.

<sup>2</sup> *The Making of Citizens* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931) and other books in the series edited by Merriam on indoctrination for citizenship. The titles are listed in the Editor's Preface of this summary volume.

<sup>3</sup> Personal contacts in reception rooms and group conferences are not considered to be the unique province of the publicity office, although they are very useful as a medium of deliberate communication.

The *newspaper* may be given only spot-news releases, or it may also be given feature articles, news photographs, documentary or feature photographs, cartoon copy, cartoon mats, map or diagram copy, or map or diagram mats.<sup>4</sup>

The *radio* broadcasters may be given any or all of the following: script for addresses, studio dramas, studio interviews, news broadcasts, or transcriptions (i.e., disk records) for dramas or for any other type of program.

*Motion pictures* may be made with voice alone, with music alone, with voice and music, or silent. For newsreel shots, when the control of staging the shot is not in the hands of the publicity agent, he can suggest to the performer ahead of time any of a variety of possible actions or statements.

*Film-strips* may be made with voice alone, with music alone, with voice and music, or silent without or silent with an accompanying mimeographed discourse.<sup>5</sup>

*Exhibits* may be prepared for traveling and thus have one or many types of audience, depending upon the route to be traveled; or they may be constructed especially for one occasion when the audience can be anticipated with more accuracy.

*Periodicals* (magazines) may be used by the publicity staff writing its own special articles, by supplying photographs or maps and graphs to illustrate articles by writers from outside the agency, or by guiding outside writers to data which the agency wants disseminated. The agency's publicity office may also publish a periodical of its own for circulation among its own employees or its citizen-clientele or both.

<sup>4</sup> Spot news is concerned with events or conditions which the newspaper would normally report immediately, while a feature story may be built around events and conditions that do not require immediate publication. Mats are paper molds made from an engraving and mailed out to the newspaper. They can be cast for the press in the newspaper plant at very small cost.

<sup>5</sup> A film-strip is made of photographs arranged in sequence but projected separately onto a screen. In appearance the individual pictures on the screen are similar to slide projections. The film-strip is much less cumbersome to transport than a set of slides and can be manipulated more efficiently. Sound effects, speech, and music can be recorded on a disk, synchronized with the sequence on the film.

*Pamphlets* may be illustrated or not, may be printed, or may be duplicated by one of the near-printing processes.

*Posters* may be printed with type only or may have illustrations of varying effectiveness. They may be small in size or may be billboards of either the painted or pasted-sheet variety.

#### THE NEWSPAPER

The newspaper is, of course, the most used medium of government publicity offices. It is a long-established way of reaching the public, and it is most prominent in the experience of most of the generation of publicity agents now at work. Its total audience is estimated at 36,000,000 readers of daily papers alone.<sup>6</sup> Pending further and more exact discovery of the relative psychological influences of the various media of communication, the newspaper is still considered by both propagandists and students alike to be a powerful director and reflector of public opinion, and it is accordingly first in the attention of commentators on democracy and propaganda. Most important of all is the fact that the newspaper, with the news magazine, is the only medium of communication which is organized primarily to gather news, hence, since publicity is news released for a purpose, the newspaper is the chief medium that is ready and anxious at all times to use publicity. The motion picture (with the exception of the newsreel which is a modified newspaper illustration) is designed to give entertainment, not information; the radio likewise sells entertainment, and when it does give information as a minor part of its service, it takes much of such news from the newspaper agencies. Washington, to the great fortune of the federal publicity agents, is a major center of news-gathering in the United States. Large staffs are maintained there by the Associated Press, United Press, and International News Service, the three major news-gathering agencies

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm M. Willey, "Communication Agencies and the Volume of Propaganda," *Annals*, CLXXIX (May, 1935), 195; see also Willey and Stuart A. Rice, "The Agencies of Communication," in U.S. President's Research Committee on Social Trends, *Recent Social Trends in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1933).

which report the nation and the world for local papers. Many local papers keep special correspondents in residence there, while some correspondents constitute little news bureaus in themselves and send dispatches to a "string" of several scattered papers. Within recent years the columnist to deal in political gossip and rumor has gained popularity, adding to the previous attention given the more ponderous editorial commentator on national affairs. The newspaper is, then, especially accessible to government publicity offices in Washington because it is so thoroughly represented there by solicitors.

All the forty-four federal offices answering the question issue releases of "spot news" to the press. Twenty-eight also issue feature stories whenever they have the time and opportunity. Twenty-one of the forty-four offices prepare or make available straight news photographs or illustrations of persons or events at the time spot news is breaking. Eight release documentary or feature photographs, which are more akin to the feature story than to spot news, since they may be pertinent whenever published. Only two offices issue cartoons, one making available either cartoon copy or mats and one providing only copy. Six of the offices issue copy of maps and diagrams, such as graphs, and four offices have mats made of such material.

The bare statement of how the newspapers are used is not, however, as significant as an analysis of what is covered in the content. Furthermore, since many releases never appear widely in print and since much of the publicity for federal agencies is given to individual reporters, a study of the press releases themselves would be of little value in discovering the true use of the press. A more revealing search would approach first the newspaper itself and see what has been printed in it about government agencies, relating this to an examination of press releases to estimate the percentage of such news that obviously had its origin in a publicity office. Table 1 represents such a search among 1,281 items of government news appearing in the *New York Times* in six week from February 3 through April 18, 1937, and one week from July 21 through July 27, 1937.

If the United States has such a thing as a national newspaper, the *New York Times* is it. A Washington staff feeds the paper's demand for news of the national government; a large circulation outside of New York means that news is selected and given weight for more than its mere local importance; and the editorial departments, even though they exclude heart interest, women's household hints, and comic strips, are as many in number and more complete in coverage than those of the typical American newspaper.<sup>7</sup> The *Times*, as far as this study is concerned, offsets the possible lack of governmental reference in these omitted features by giving more space than the typical newspaper to financial news, of which government issues large volumes, and by reporting more of the factual information sent out by the federal offices. There is, in other words, perhaps more use of federal publicity releases in the *Times* than in most American newspapers, and it is sufficient as a demonstration of the sort of news (though not the amount) sent out by the federal publicity offices. A possible exception to this would be in the realm of certain types of farm news. The *Times* apparently reports all agricultural news of national or financial importance, but it has no special department for the information of farmers concerning the growing of crops or the borrowing of federal farm loan funds. Farm Credit Administration and Rural Electrification Administration, for example, would have more of their news printed in rural journals or in metropolitan journals with strong rural circulation than in the *Times*,

<sup>7</sup> Government reference is not often found in heart-interest or comic strips. An exception, however, to this would be the cartoon strips "War on Crime" by Rex Collier, "Don Winslow of the Navy" by Frank V. Martinek, lieutenant commander, U.S.N.R., and Leon A. Beroth, and "The G-Man" by George Clark and Lou Hanlon. The first is a property of the Ledger Syndicate; the second is distributed by the Bell Syndicate, Inc.; and the third began in the *Washington Post*, February 18, 1937. Don Winslow is a handsome and heroic naval officer who goes through the usual routine of adventure-strip predicaments and escapes. The title "War on Crime" is supplemented by the statement: "True Stories of G-Men Activities Based on Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation—Modified in the Public Interest." For a comic strip, "Little Orphan Annie," which was used as antiadministration propaganda, see Richard L. Neuberger, "Hooverism in the Funnies," *New Republic*, July 11, 1934, p. 234.



TABLE 1

SUBJECT CONTENT OF NEWSPAPER PUBLICITY FOR FEDERAL AGENCIES, NUMERICAL SCORE  
 BASED UPON EMPHASIS GIVEN ITEM, *New York Times*, SEVEN WEEKS, 1937

Agency	Effort To In- flu- ence Leg- isla- tion	Effort To In- flu- ence Pol- icy	Progress, Policy, Pro- cedure	Facts from Records and Re- search	What the Agen- cy Does and How	News of Per- son- nel	Fea- ture Stories from Work	De- fense against At- tack	Deci- sions and Rul- ings	Appli- cations, An- swers, Com- plaints	Hear- ings, Sched- ule, and Testi- mony	Con- tracts, Bids	Photo- graphs Score	Total Items	Total Score, All Cate- gories
Agricultural Adjustment Ad- ministration.....		30	29					4.5						11	63.5
Department of Agriculture..	36.5	36.5	27.5	126.5	5	12.5	22	3					52	70	321.5
Department of Commerce....		26.5	34.5	263.5	33	14	44.5	6					13	116	435.0
Emergency Conservation Work.....			3		2	5	19	3				7	23	12	62.0
Farm Credit Association.....			14.5											4	14.5
Federal Communications Commission.....			3.5		10.5	13					12.5			9	39.5
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.....			6.5	5										3	11.5
Federal Home Loan Bank Board.....			19.5		16									9	35.5
Federal Housing Administra- tion.....		3	22	9	39.5	3								19	76.5
Federal Power Commission..		6	6					17.5			10			8	33.5
Federal Reserve Board.....	6	5.5	17.5	440										50	469.0
Federal Tariff Commission..		2.5		4.5		5							1	4	13.0

TABLE 1—Continued

Agency	Effort To In- flu- ence Leg- isla- tion	Effort To In- flu- ence Pol- icy	Progress, Policy, Pro- cedure	Facts from Records and Re- search	What the Agen- cy Does and How	News of Per- son- nel	Fea- ture Stories from Work	De- fense against At- tack	Deci- sions and Rul- ings	Appli- cations, An- swers, Com- plaints	Hear- ings, Sched- ule, and Testi- mony	Con- tracts, graphs Bids Score	Photo- graphs Score	Total Items	Total Score, All Cate- gories
Federal Trade Commission	9								13 5	101	16			39	139.5
Government Printing Office					6 5									2	6.5
Department of Interior	26	6	35	69	42		37 5						47	64	262.5
Interstate Commerce Com- mission	7.5		19.5	12.5	6		4 5		82.5	52.5	42.5			66	227.5
Department of Justice	29	3.5	5 5	3	8	6	6		3					14	67.0
Department of Labor	4.5	27	52.5	108		4					3	34.5	3	47	236.5
Library of Congress					15									3	15.0
National Labor Relations Board	6		6 5		13 5				27	6.5	39			18	98.5
National Resources Commis- sion		23												3	23.0
National Youth Administra- tion			13.5	3	17.5								8	12	42.0
Navy Department		7	62.5		30	20	7	8	5			31	23	45	193.5
Post Office Department	3		46		3.5	11.5	4.5		3					16	71.5
President	146	119	212.5		28	276.5	30.5		11				107	177	930.5
Public Works Administration			48										30	14	78.0
Reconstruction Finance Cor- poration			46.5											12	46.5
Resettlement Administration		12	9.5		20	10	3.5							12	55.0

TABLE 1—Continued

Agency	Effort To In- fluence Leg- isla- tion	Effort To In- flu- ence Pol- icy	Progress, Policy, Pro- cedure	Facts from Records and Re- search	What the Agen- cy Does and How	News of Per- son- nel	Fea- ture Stories from Work	De- fense against At- tack	Deci- sions and Rul- ings	Appli- cations, An- swers, Com- plaints	Hear- ings, Sched- ule, and Testi- mony	Con- tracts, graphs and Bids	Photo- graphs Score	Total Items	Total Score, All Cate- gories
Rural Electrification Admin- istration . . . . .						9								2	9.0
Securities and Exchange Commission . . . . .	18	66	100.5	7.5	7.5	11	37		49.5	139	243			137	627.0
Smithsonian Institution . . . . .					2	7								9	44.5
Social Security Board . . . . .		35.5	7	7.5	12	31.5		4.5		3.5			5	13	56.5
State Department . . . . .	3	115.5	7.5	99.5	49	10.5	27.5						3	41	188.5
Treasury Department . . . . .	5.5	155										12	1	89	360.0
U.S. Board of Tax Appeals . . . . .									8.5	7.5				8	16.0
U.S. Civil Service Commis- sion . . . . .			12.5											4	12.5
U.S. Maritime Commission . . . . .		11				8			5			11	5	10	40.0
War Department . . . . .		74		37	39	6						32.5	68	62	256.5
Works Progress Administra- tion . . . . .	7	109	8	44	11	3							9	47	201.0
Total . . . . .	283.5	343.0	1,307.0	447.5	597.5	252.5	46.5	208.0	310.0	366.0	128.0	401	1,281	5,879.5	

hence their showing in the *Times* would be lighter than in papers from the farming cities. The showing of agencies giving out financial news would, contrarily, be heavier in the *Times* than in rural or farm-center papers. The end sought, however, is not a competitive weighing of the amount of publicity secured by the various agencies but only a picture of the content of the publicity which is printed.

In this analysis only stories whose origin could be assigned to Washington with reasonable certainty were examined. This origin was determined in most cases by the date line. All the stories which were written on information of the sort distributed by federal administrative publicity offices, as a continuous examination of their press releases indicated, were counted as having been issued by the office. This is permissible, even though the story may carry a by-line of the paper's reporter, because the Washington reporters in practice usually re-write what is given them by the publicity offices or get from press offices the information for original stories. Even when a Cabinet official is being quoted, it is reasonably certain that the press official of the Department was consulted and that the conference was arranged by him. Prepared statements by high officials are uniformly released through the press agent, and copies of speeches are prepared and distributed by his office. In many cases such speeches are written in his office.

Certain routine releases would have given too much weight because of the space they occupy daily in the *Times*, so they were omitted from consideration. They include the daily weather report, the official announcements of Civil Service examinations, Army orders and assignment, Naval orders, movements of Naval vessels, and similar news of the Coast Guard.

Finally, a word concerning the measurement of news content is necessary before considering the table. The intricate and exact quantitative measurement of newspapers is justified, a review of the various methodological experiments shows, only when changes in content are to be measured over a period of

time, when comparisons are to be made between newspapers analyzed by different observers or when content is to be taken as a measure of public opinion. A qualitative analysis can be made with relatively rough techniques.<sup>8</sup> Yet to give an accurate picture of the types of news-content in federal releases, some quantitative indication is required beyond a mere count of items. Without it, a subject appearing in numerous two-inch clippings on little-read facts would outweigh a subject in fewer items that were all of major importance in reader-interest. To balance the picture, arbitrary weights were assigned to the size of headline, width of headline, length of item in columns, column-width of illustration, and location on page one. Each item was then given a score according to its possession of these factors.<sup>9</sup> In assigning items to their categories of news-content, the emphasis of the headline and first paragraph, or lead, were accepted as indicating the category. A story may, of course, contain references to various categories, but the major emphasis is given in the heading and first paragraph by long-standing practice in newspaper editing.

<sup>8</sup> Julian Laurence Woodward, *Foreign News in American Morning Newspapers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> The arbitrary weights were *head size*: less than 12 point, 0.5; 12 point, 1; 18 point, 1.5; 24 point, 2; 36 point or larger, 3; *head width*: one column, 1; two columns, 2; three columns, 3; more than three columns, 4; *item length*: less than one-eighth column, 0.5; one-eighth to one-fourth column, 1; one-fourth to one-half column, 2; one-half to one column, 3; more than one column, 4; *width of illustration*: one column, 1; two columns, 3; three columns, 5; four columns, 8; more than four columns, 12. An extra weight of 1 was given for location on p. 1, and a full-page spread of pictures in the rotogravure was given a weight of 20. Thus an item less than one-eighth of a column in length with less than a 12-point head type, one column in width would be given a total weight of 2; an item of one-eighth to one-fourth column length, with a 12-point head type one column in width would be counted 3. These would represent the small and inconspicuous items. An item of one-half to one column length with a 24-point headline one column in width would be weighted 6. If it appeared on p. 1, it would be weighted 7. If it appeared on p. 1 and was more than one column in length, it would be counted 8. The figures, then, represent only a total score for each category of news-content as measured by these arbitrary weights. They serve merely as a measuring standard for comparing items when all items are measured and reported in the same standard.

An examination of the 1,281 items shows that news of federal administrative agencies falls into the following categories, listed in the descending order of their weight in emphasis as shown by the score: (1) news of the progress, policy, and procedure of the agency; (2) facts from records and research, published for the aid of readers who might find the information useful; (3) news of agency personnel; (4) news in which the emphasis is placed upon the work and techniques of the agency; (5) news of hearings before the agency in questions of regulation; (6) reporting the efforts of officials to influence either public or private policy without reference to any legislation already introduced in Congress; (7) records of applications, agreements, answers, and complaints filed before the agency; (8) reporting the efforts of administrative officials to influence legislation already introduced; (9) feature stories incidental to the work of the agency and apparently released for their value as information and only for an indirect value as publicity for the agency; (10) news of decisions or rulings; (11) records of contracts let and bids requested; and (12) reporting statements or counteraccusation in defense of the agency.

1. Most of the agencies use the press for announcing progress made in the performance of their work or to state their policy. The Secretary of the Treasury in one of the items announces that government would not attempt to change the bond market but would use its funds only to keep an orderly market. The Securities and Exchange Commission announced that it would place restrictions upon the activities of "specialists" as a means of reducing the speculative aspects of combining the functions of broker and dealer on stock exchanges. The Secretary of Labor indicated the attitude of her Department toward the prevalent sit-down strikes of early 1937 by announcing at a press conference that she did not think this type of strike technique presented any new problem. The Department of the Interior reported progress by announcing that visitors to national parks had increased by 205 per cent and that the area of national parks had increased 52.7 per cent in seven years. The

largest score for news of progress, policy, and procedure came, however, from the President's office, just as the greatest attention for several other news categories was directed toward him. From his Warm Springs vacation he returned to Washington to confer with the Senate majority leader who re-emphasized the hands-off policy of the President in the sit-down strike situation. He could give publicity to the need for curbing the rise in prices of durable goods. Whenever the President makes any public statement of his ideas or his plans, he has released news of this category.

2. The Federal Reserve Board, the Department of Commerce, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Treasury Department, as they are reflected in the *Times*, are outstanding as sources of the second type of news, the facts taken from records and research. The Federal Reserve Board reports the condition of member banks, money rates, and summaries of business conditions. The Department of Commerce gives facts of foreign trade, the extent of gold imports, credit collections for department stores, facts of domestic trade such as the amount of cotton seed crushed or the output of chemicals, facts and trends in population, figures on air travel and transport, and results of special research in the various fields covered by bureaus of the Department. Most of the factual information released by the Securities and Exchange Commission is in reports on trading on exchanges, analyses of various statistical data taken from information filed with the Commission, and transactions of officers, directors, and principal stockholders in the securities of their companies or holding companies. The Treasury Department issues statements of tax receipts and comparisons with past receipts to indicate trends, statements of the national debt, and such news from its bureaus as the amount of narcotic seizures or liquor imports.

3. The foregoing two categories are the ones of major emphasis. Of the others, news of personnel consists of resignations and appointments, ceremonial appearances when nothing

is said of policy, announcements of travels, and, especially in the case of the President, references to personal life.

4. News of the agency's work includes announcements of discoveries or inventions by agencies, such as the announcement of a test for airplane camera lenses developed in the Bureau of Standards or the invention of a smoke precipitator in the Bureau of Mines; or a story discussing the experience and plans of the agency, such as appeared after the reorganization of the Bureau of Air Commerce in 1937; or news concerning equipment and its use.

5. News of hearings is peculiar to those regulatory agencies which sit as quasi-judicial courts. The Securities and Exchange Commission is outstanding in such items. During the period of analysis, much space was given to testimony in prominent cases before the Commission.

6. Efforts of officials to influence policy include such items as appeals to interest groups to adopt certain policies or special reports which carried recommendations for a broad category of legislation without proposing a specific bill. An Assistant Secretary of Commerce told the American Paper and Pulp Association that businessmen of integrity and vision should support constructive legislation for the national good rather than for the benefit of interest groups. A few weeks later the Secretary of Commerce recommended to the Business Advisory Council that business join with labor and agriculture to consider the problems of wages, hours, child labor, and production control. The Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, who was soon to become dean of the Harvard Law School, told the Eastern Law Students' Conference that lawyers of the future would have to be conscious not of their role as craftsmen so much as of their social function as mediators of human affairs, "eager to understand the new claims, anxious to weigh their merit in the light of the cross-claims, and fearful not of change but of the want of understanding." The National Resources Committee offered a six-year program of co-ordinated



public works, with recommendations for legislative policy to carry out the program.

7. News of applications, agreements, answers, and complaints filed before the agency is self-explanatory as a category. It includes such items as the "stipulations," or agreements, to mend their ways of competition filed by business firms with the Federal Trade Commission. It is heavily loaded with news of registrations of stock issues filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission. It deals too with applications by railroads for sanctions from the Interstate Commerce Commission.

8. The chief example of efforts by administrative officials to influence legislation during this period was the heated discussion of the President's bill to reorganize the Supreme Court. Cabinet officers made speeches which were reported with large headings on page 1 and therefore had weight in the summary. Other attempts to influence legislation appeared with sufficient frequency, however, to indicate that such news would be common in times when no single spectacular bill was being pushed by the President. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for example, appeared outspoken against a proposed repeal of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. The newspaper reported defenses of the Act which he had written for a social-work publication and for his own periodical, *Indians at Work*, a near-printed house organ of the Office of Indian Affairs. The Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board appeared before the House Banking and Currency Committee to support a bill extending until 1939 the authority of the Reserve banks to issue notes secured by United States obligations. Other officials appeared before other congressional committees to advocate or oppose bills affecting their agencies.

9. The feature story incidental to the work of the agency has its publicity value in giving the reader a pleasing tidbit for his curiosity while mentioning the agency as the source. The releases present mainly short reports of the sort of information that brightens the routine of work and causes passing comment among technicians. From the Department of Agriculture came

the unimportant but interesting note that all puppies of a cross-breeding experiment at the Beltsville, Maryland, farm born in 1936 were given names beginning with "A" and all born in 1937 would carry names beginning with "B." The Department of Commerce considers the market for mouth harps and reports, in separate items, that Germany since the advent of the Nazis is not importing any Jews' harps, while the United States is importing fewer but costlier harmonicas. The Bureau of Fisheries in the same department is the source of the statement that it is seeking a team of walking fish, or climbing perch, which walk from one pond to another on their hard front fins. An Associated Press dispatch reveals that the Bureau of Standards has no standard foot nor pound but only the standard meter and kilogram. The Department of the Interior announces that it declined to help a young woman who, quite in error, thought the Department maintained a matrimonial bureau. One agency, the Smithsonian Institution, releases serious feature stories, based on research, as almost its only type of news.

10. News of decisions and rulings is released mainly by the quasi-judicial regulatory bodies.

11. The news of contracts and bids deals principally with purchases under the Public Contracts Act, reported by the Department of Labor, and with purchases made by the War and Navy departments.

12. Many stories released by federal offices are perhaps provoked by some attack on the agency, although seldom is this reason evident in the release. The category of defense as here defined included only releases which were avowed replies to an opponent. The use of defensive releases which are patent as such produced in this analysis the fewest number of items and carried a score of only 39 out of a total score of 5,884.5. The appearance of this type of story will vary with circumstances. In the present period, the Federal Power Commission made the only considerable use of it when the chairman engaged in a controversy with the Chairman of the New York Public Service Commission over an alleged statement by the federal chairman

that the New York City power rates were high in relation to other communities.

This brief survey of newspaper publicity affirms again the catholicity of the modern newspaper. It is a catchall for whatever men seek as information or entertainment. It sells scientific knowledge and sports news, financial news and gossip about personalities. In one way this very diversity of its departments is an advantage to the government publicity office, for it offers an outlet through a mass medium to a specialized audience that reads a specialized type of news within the total conglomeration of news. The Bureau of Standards, the Department of Commerce, the Emergency Conservation Work, the National Labor Relations Board, the National Youth Administration, and the Treasury Department all report in the questionnaires that experience indicates the newspaper as their most effective outlet.

The ephemeral nature of the daily newspaper adds another advantage to it as an outlet for government news. Much of the information to be reported by government is transient in its value. Department store sales would be meaningless if held by the Federal Reserve Board's statisticians until they could be embalmed in the proverbial annual report. So too the data gathered by the Department of Commerce and many other fact-finding agencies must be given to the clientele immediately to be of use. A monthly publication would be too infrequent for this type of information. Speed counts as well when the objective is to influence legislation and to announce policies of administration.

The press release is one of the cheaper ways of getting news to the public. The cost to government is small, and the circulation in terms of readers per release is large. The press releases themselves have, in addition, become established as a way to keep a special public informed, even when not published in a medium. Many agencies maintain mailing lists including names of many individuals as well as of newspapers. In some instances, the audience interested in procedure, policy, or facts

from research must rely exclusively on press releases for information. The Bureau of Mines goes so far as to print on the outside of its "News-Bulletin" envelopes the injunction: "To those who open the mail: Please be sure that the person whose name appears on this envelope receives this Bulletin, as it is one of a collection being made by him, and his set will be incomplete if any are missing." It is reasonable to suppose that if such specialized audiences were not served with the economical mimeographed press release, some more expensive periodical would have to be issued.

But the newspaper loses value as a medium for seriously telling about the work of an agency. Newspapers print only those stories which fall into limited stereotypes of style and content and will have none of the purely descriptive matter that can be found in periodicals and pamphlets. Certainly, the newspaper is the place to report current developments that reflect the work of the agency, and this is largely the type of story released to the press, but a supplementary use of periodicals, pamphlets, lectures, and visual media in which the agency's purpose and method could be described without reference to a necessary immediate event would be recommended.

#### USE OF PERIODICALS

Thirty-one of the forty-four publicity offices report that they prepare special articles for the periodical (magazine) press. Twenty-four supply photographs to illustrate articles by outside writers, and sixteen supply maps and diagrams for outside writers.

The articles referring to federal agencies fall by content into three major classes, as shown by an examination of 864 titles which indicated with reasonable certainty that a federal administrative agency was involved in the article and which appeared in the 108 periodicals indexed by *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* for the eleven months from June 9, 1936, through May 3, 1937.<sup>10</sup> The categories of content in the descending

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co.), XXXVI, No. 12 (June 9, 1936—January 4, 1937); No. 20 (January 5, 1937—May 3, 1937).

order of emphasis are (1) articles presenting news and discussion of policy or personnel of the agency; (2) articles describing or discussing the role, techniques, achievement, and equipment of the agency; and (3) articles on the subject matter with which the agency deals and reflecting the agency's policy and work through the treatment of its subject.<sup>11</sup> Table 2 shows the distribution among the categories of items pertaining to the federal agencies.

The topics of magazine articles appear to follow reader-interest as it is interpreted by editors. The Department of Agriculture is represented by an equal attention to its policy and to the subject matter with which it deals, with slighter reference to its work; the Department of Commerce is noticed first for its policies regarding airplane regulation; Emergency Conservation Work is interesting equally because of its policies and because of its work in the Civilian Conservation Corps. Readers, as editors judge their interests, want to know how to get money from Federal Housing Administration; businessmen are concerned with the policies of the Federal Reserve Board, Federal Trade Commission, Interstate Commerce Commission, and Securities and Exchange Commission. Both employers and labor want to know the policies of the National Labor Relations Board. Public Works Administration is discussed primarily for its policy, but also receives attention for the feats of engineering and the extent of building activities which it supervises. Resettlement Administration is most interesting because of its policies established in attempting to cope with the land-use and social rehabilitation problem and for its striking idea of building entire communities. The departments of State and Treasury are discussed for their policies in foreign affairs and debt and taxation; the Treasury, also, through its odd mothering of stray function, gets attention for the work of the Coast Guard.

Emphasis on the work of agencies, in addition to that given

<sup>11</sup> Articles were assigned to categories according to major content as it was indicated by title.

TABLE 2\*

SUBJECT CONTENT OF PERIODICAL ARTICLES REFERRING TO FEDERAL ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCIES, COMPILED FROM *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, JUNE 9, 1936, THROUGH MAY 3, 1937 (ELEVEN MONTHS)

Agency	News or Discussion of Policy or Personnel	Emphasis on Work or Equipment	Subject Matter of Agency's Work	Number of Items of Reference
Agricultural Adjustment Administration	11	.....	6	17
Department of Agriculture (General)...	19	10	17	46
Bureau of Public Roads.....	.....	.....	6	6
Food and Drug Administration.....	4	3	8	15
Soil Conservation Service.....	.....	2	8	10
Forest Service.....	1	1	5	7
Department of Commerce.....	19	12	8	39
Co-ordinator Industrial Co-operative†...	1	1	1	3
Emergency Conservation Work.....	11	11	.....	22
Farm Credit Administration.....	1	.....	2	3
Federal Communications Commission...	4	1	.....	5
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation...	1	.....	.....	1
Federal Home Loan Bank Board.....	2	.....	.....	2
Federal Housing Administration.....	8	.....	.....	8
Federal Power Commission.....	2	.....	1	3
Federal Reserve Board.....	8	.....	.....	8
Federal Trade Commission.....	14	2	.....	16
Department of Interior (General).....	3	.....	.....	3
Bureau of Mines.....	.....	1	.....	1
Bureau of Reclamation.....	.....	8	.....	8
National Park Service.....	.....	1	4	5
Office of Education.....	2	6	4	12
Office of Indian Affairs.....	6	.....	.....	6
Interstate Commerce Commission.....	8	1	.....	9
Department of Justice.....	5	11	7	23
Department of Labor.....	4	4	3	11
National Bituminous Coal Commission...	1	.....	2	3
National Labor Relations Board.....	6	1	.....	7
National Resources Committee.....	1	1	1	3
National Youth Administration.....	8	5	.....	13
Navy Department.....	4	9	.....	13
Post Office Department.....	1	1	.....	2
President.....	134	18	.....	152
Public Works Administration.....	9	6	1	16
P.W.A. Housing Division.....	5	4	.....	9
Reconstruction Finance Corporation...	7	.....	.....	7
Resettlement Administration.....	18	7	5	30
Rural Electrification Administration...	6	.....	7	13
Securities and Exchange Commission...	17	2	8	27
Smithsonian Institution.....	.....	.....	3	3

\* References to articles in periodicals published by the federal government are not counted.  
 † Agency later abolished.

TABLE 2—*Continued*

Agency	News or Discussion of Policy or Personnel	Emphasis on Work or Equipment	Subject Matter of Agency's Work	Number of Items of Reference
Social Security Board.....	6	10	44	60
State Department.....	12	3	3	18
Treasury Department.....	10	14	5	29
U.S. Public Health Service.....	2	5	11	18
U.S. Civil Service Commission.....	1	3	16	20
U.S. Maritime Commission.....	11	1	.....	12
U.S. Tariff Commission.....	2	.....	1	3
War Department.....	5	16	.....	21
Works Progress Administration.....	38	55	3	96
Total.....	438	236	190	864

the Coast Guard and counted under the Treasury, is given, as would be expected, to those agencies which perform visible feats, in contrast to the less spectacular work of such agencies as regulatory bodies or fiscal offices. The armed services especially appeal to the perennial interest in destruction and the planning for destruction. Sham battles and ships and guns are always good for space in popular magazines. This raises, incidentally, the interesting point that the Army and Navy publicity offices apparently do not spend so much time getting space for articles about the need for larger defense appropriations as they are supposed by some to spend. They concentrate, instead, on supplying writers with pictures and facts about plans and equipment. In the long run this sort of content may be the best for getting larger appropriations. Congressmen and presidents are not more mature than the general public when the fascination of guns is presented, especially when the public has been conditioned to be proud of the services by long exposure to their exploits. Retired officers speaking before clubs may carry on the fight against potential enemies; the publicity agent on the job is preoccupied with answering questions about what and how the services perform.

- The Federal Bureau of Investigation in the Department of

Justice is another example of emphasis on work. "G-men" are spectacular. They follow the most notorious criminals in the land, and at the end of the trail they not infrequently stage a public gun-fight in the midst of a crowded city until "the rat," as the G-men and journalists call him, is put away. Sometimes the rat does away with a G-man first, proving that the work is hazardous and adding to its power as a subject for articles. Even congressmen like to hear about gun play and detective work.<sup>12</sup>

The Works Progress Administration, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Office of Education are the only pacific agencies publicized primarily for their work, with the possible exception of Emergency Conservation Work, which received as much attention for work as for policy. This attention is due largely to the work projects which are by their nature in the public eye. The Federal Theatre and the other arts projects were new in the experience of the nation. They dealt with matters of wide interest, and they appealed to the critics who write for the metropolitan press and whose influence reaches ultimately through the magazines into all sections of the country. The Bureau of Reclamation received attention because of the colossal size of the Grand Coulee and Boulder Dam projects. Interest in the Office of Education was mainly from professional educational journals which carried articles on the work of the Office.

Social security was an outstanding topic of the year under review, and accordingly the Social Security Board found more references to its subject matter than to its policies of administration or its methods of work. The Social Security Act as it had finally come through the congressional mill was not satis-

<sup>12</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Bureau, took a G-man souvenir—the watch of bandit "Pretty Boy" Floyd, notched ten times—to the House Subcommittee on Appropriations when he was discussing the proposed 1936 appropriation for his agency. He also told the lawmakers stories of famous cases of the year (U.S. Congress, House Committee of Appropriations, *Hearing before Sub-committee on Department of Justice Appropriation Bill for 1936* [74th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office)], pp. 97-100).



factory to some; the provisions of the Act and the way it would affect various types of beneficiaries were unknown to many. The magazines turned to the subject and, with information frequently supplied by the Social Security Board's Informational Service, discussed and explained the meaning of security and the operation of the law. Some other agencies were represented by discussions of their subject matter. The Department of Agriculture, for one, was involved in consideration of farm tenancy and crop problems which were current at this time. The United States Civil Service Commission, while not actively promoting publicity concerning the merit system as a principle, was affected at least remotely by the discussion of civil service gains and prospects which provided sixteen magazine references during the period. The campaign of the United States Public Health Service to secure open recognition of venereal diseases as a prologue to a campaign for control was primarily a consideration of the subject matter under the agency rather than an emphasis on the agency's policies or methods.

Because the President is the leader of his party and in the period of 1933 to date the chief spokesman for a political and economic philosophy which has been identified as his own, the magazine references to him are predominantly to his policies as the leader of the federal government in both its legislative and executive functions rather than to his role as the chief administrator of the executive wing. Of the 156 articles referring to him, 134, or 85 per cent, deal with his policies, and the remaining 18, or 15 per cent, describe his methods of work or the non-political events of his job. In one sense these references to the President are not administrative publicity because they deal with the political role of the executive. But if they are excluded, then many other releases from administrative publicity offices outside the White House would have to be excluded. The fact is that support for administrative policy—one of the objectives of administrative publicity—may be secured best from a presidential statement, and the references to him

are inseparable from publicity attached to administrative agencies. More on this point will appear in a discussion of coordination in chapter vi.

An outlet more limited in circulation than the outside periodicals is provided in the periodicals of government agencies themselves. Seventeen of the forty-four, or 39 per cent of the information offices publish periodicals. With the exception of two, those of the Food and Drug Administration for employees and state officials and of the National Park Service for employees, these magazines go to an audience of persons with special interests in the work and subject matter of the agencies. The content, therefore, is specialized in all of them, though in some it is written in a more popular style than in others. Two extremes of style are represented by the *Federal Reserve Bulletin*, which records information that the Federal Reserve Board has gathered, and *Indians at Work*, published monthly by the Office of Indian Affairs to present essays by Indians and to describe the agency's work, problems, policies, and subject matter, as well as the opinions of the Commissioner.

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

In the past development of visual communication, photographs have been used principally as illustrations of printed text. Only recently have students and practitioners of photography begun to experiment with pictures as the direct means of giving information, supplanting all text save a minimum of identification.

Most pictures from government publicity offices remain in the older and still most common tradition of straight news photography. They offer, in other words, pictures of equipment, projects, and persons in connection with some event that makes news, as the editors judge news. The reason for this is plain: the media by which photography is distributed on a large scale are open to this type of illustrative picture. The publicity photographer must follow the pattern of supplying what the media want if he hopes to see his pictures published.

When the media send their own photographers to his agency, he will help them get the pictures they want. The President offers a good example of such news photography. He is the same man in each picture, and he performs all his activities in a routine, but he is surrounded by photographers every time he moves, and the monotony of the type of pictures taken of him seems not to bother news photographers seriously. On occasion, of course, the editors will try to get what Al Smith called "baloney pictures," and if the subject is naïve about publicity, the result may be President Calvin Coolidge wearing a ten-gallon hat or an Indian chief's head feathers, but it may be said that such pictures from government offices in the present period are extremely rare.<sup>13</sup>

The War Department, following the news pattern, has striking shots of Army bombing planes and pictures of personnel. In its civil functions it finds space for pictures of dams and spillways. The Department of Interior's motion-picture division can furnish still pictures of the wide variety of scenery in national parks. Public works projects offer subjects frequently published in newspaper and magazine illustration, while the personnel and projects of the Civilian Conservation Corps seem always new to news editors. The typical government picture is not outstanding for its imagination in content, but it conforms to the standard practices of a press that shows a paucity of originality. So long as rotogravure editors give valuable space to the inevitable spring flood of "queens" of various vegetable

<sup>13</sup> Westbrook Pegler summed up the current practice in his syndicated newspaper column thus: "I notice . . . that very few baloney pictures have been coming out of the White House run. There was one of Mr. Roosevelt's dog, a setter, cleaning a plate, following the story of the dog having eaten up 24 portions of ham and eggs, but dog pictures and other animal pictures are legitimate human interest. . . . The Presidents also used to be targets for a great cargo of two-headed calves and freak potatoes which happened to grow into remote human likenesses of Abraham Lincoln, but Mr. Roosevelt seems to have discouraged his loving and publicity-loving friends in various parts of the country who otherwise might send him all such trash" ("Fair Enough," *Washington Post*, February 19, 1937, p. 9).

festivals, the government photographer will no doubt follow suit by taking the obvious picture in his field.

The wisdom of such conformity can be questioned, however, in the light of the discernible trends in publicity photography. The appearance of picture magazines and their success in circulation and the outstanding success of those government publicity pictures which have left the beaten track in content have probably set the course for the future. The laggard traditional type of content may very likely be outmoded within a few years. The public interest in photography, even during the experimental stage of the search for the ideal use of pictures as news and entertainment, has been a surprise to publishers and will undoubtedly bring more and more attention to pictures in all printing. *Life*, a weekly picture magazine, began with a circulation of 380,000 in November, 1936, and had climbed to a circulation of 1,200,000 in August, 1937. It claims that surveys indicate a total reader-audience of more than 10,000,000, or an average of 9.4 readers per copy.<sup>14</sup> *Look*, another picture magazine, began publication in late 1936 and had reached a circulation of more than 1,300,000 in August, 1937.<sup>15</sup> With such picture-hunger evident in two levels of the popular trade, an expansion of the use of pictures and more attention to originality will probably follow.

In Washington the signs of a new view toward content appear in the notable work of Resettlement Administration and to a smaller extent in the work of the other relief and conservation agencies. The subjects of land and people offer the creative photographer an opportunity to use his camera as a dramatic but accurate instrument of reporting. Pictures, furthermore, can be far more effective in describing erosion or dust storms or poverty than any amount of text, hence photography becomes the most economical way of reporting certain conditions.

The content of pictures in the emerging pattern is distinctive

<sup>14</sup> Advertisement, *New York Times*, August 13, 1937, pp. 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> *Look*, August 17, 1937, p. 3.

first for its intimate approach to the subject. In contrast to the traditional news photograph which would hardly ever present a nameless person, Resettlement Administration's files are crowded with closeup shots of poverty-ridden farmers, of children undernourished and dirty, of women stooped and discouraged, of ramshackle houses where life is incredibly mean. All these people are nameless, but they symbolize in tragic impact the reason for spending federal funds to improve the lot of submarginal farmers. Urban slums also have been photographed, because Resettlement Administration had three suburban rehousing projects which the Information Division must publicize. The plight of slum-dwellers generally has been pictured by other housing agencies as well. Drought was another subject of wide coverage by photography, including pictures taken by Resettlement Administration, which was involved in drought relief. Always in the better examples of the new photography, the camera takes the audience into the very lives of the people who are portrayed, and by a combination of selection, technical means, and artistic sensitivity on the part of the photographer it establishes an intimacy between audience and subject. This implies a realistic approach which denies romanticism.

Another characteristic of this new style is the persistent attention to the aesthetic values of form and texture. The Resettlement Administration files have numerous examples of "good" photography, in terms of art, which is also good publicity photography.<sup>16</sup> The details of light and shadow and the composition are not of first importance in publicity, but they contribute that subtle factor which raises the picture as a whole

<sup>16</sup> The first one-man show of photography ever held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in October, 1938, was devoted to the work of Walker Evans, formerly a photographer with Resettlement Administration. Many of the photographs in this exhibition and in the published collection issued at the time of the exhibition, were taken for this federal agency. See *Time*, XXXII, No. 14 (October 3, 1938), 43, for a review of the exhibition, and *Walker Evans, American Photographs*, with an essay by Lincoln Kirstein (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), for reproductions of eighty-seven photographs.

from the routine to the superior class and enhances the mere subject matter with an element of dramatic beauty.<sup>17</sup> No studied effects are sought, however. The camera records a person in relation to his surroundings and any dramatic quality must come from the facts.

A third distinction is appearing in the narrative use of pictures in sequence. This has been adopted chiefly by the picture magazines but it is a device that will probably spread to newspapers and magazines. A good example is the sequence of dust-storm pictures released by the Department of Agriculture and published in *Look*, August 17, 1937. The first photograph shows a street in Elkhart, Kansas, with a cloud of dust just appearing beyond the far roof line. The second picture was taken three minutes later; the third, about the same time; the fourth, six minutes later when the black cloud had begun to settle to the earth in the street directly in front of the camera; and the fifth, taken seven minutes after the first, shows an almost pitch-dark scene. The legend of the last, incidentally, shows the hand of the government publicity man and also the publicity value of such photography. "Soil experts," the caption reads, "say at least 50 per cent of the dust area should be returned to grass, as it was years ago. The government is confident the area is not lost. It can be revived by co-operation of the men who live on the soil, but this will mean years of work and patience. The government is working out a special 'land use' program which includes proper planting."

Finally, the new photography is dramatic. It takes commonplace scenes and gives them uncommon force by approaching them intensively and freshly; by isolating a suggestive segment of a whole and concentrating upon it; by catching people when they are unposed and therefore honestly displaying the emotional content of their personalities. Sometimes this dramatic approach can become ridiculous, as is the humorous but lamentable instance of Resettlement's property steer's skull which

<sup>17</sup> The photographs in this book are examples of Resettlement Administration's publicity pictures.

was placed on a parched mud flat to symbolize the drought and thereby incurred the wrath of Fargo, North Dakota, where the shot was taken.<sup>18</sup> When handled with dignity, the selective use of the camera enhances the value of the picture by arousing attention and also by making a lasting impression upon the audience. In no case would the addition of stage properties to the scene be demanded by the need for dramatic value. The good photographer depends upon the scene in its simple realism for drama and gets it without adornment.

A word should be inserted concerning the potential use of aerial photography for informative ends. Some striking air-views have already come from some federal offices, notably in the publicity for land-use planning and practice. The future will no doubt see a more extensive use of air pictures to depict public works, community rehabilitation, water use, and other types of enterprise, for the airplane has provided a new dimension to man's view of his earth, a new perspective on the true extent of many public projects. A highway has hardly been grasped by the citizen on the ground, but seen in a broad sweep it becomes an impressive example of the feats of government and of the ability of government to create stupendous things. The real nature of strip-cropping a field comes to meaning only when seen from the air. A picture from a very high altitude showing the multitude of little streams that feed a river can demonstrate the story of flood prevention in these streams better than any drawing or any picture of a single check-dam. Gradually and steadily photographers for informational purposes will no doubt take their cameras into the air more and more to get the perspective essential to the effective portrayal of some of the colossal projects and problems with which government now deals. Air photography will put its audience in touch with objects and events outside the comprehension of earth-bound eyes and will join the photography of people in relation to the intimate objects of their world on the ground to offer a composite picture of greatly expanded uses in publicity.

<sup>18</sup> "Fargo Fakery," *Time*, Vol. XXVIII (September 7, 1936).

## MOTION PICTURES

The United States Information Service lists 456 "government movies" available on May 1, 1937.<sup>19</sup> An analysis of the titles of these films indicates that they had their origin in twenty-six agencies, though the details of production were handled in only five government motion-picture offices and an equal number of contracting producing companies. The one Division of Motion Pictures in the Department of Agriculture's Extension Service makes films for at least sixteen agencies within the Department; Emergency Conservation Work has had films made by this office in Agriculture and also by the Department of Interior and the War Department motion-picture offices. In addition to these, motion pictures have been made for four agencies—the United States Civil Service Commission, Farm Credit Administration, Public Works Administration, and United States Maritime Commission—which do not appear in the public list under consideration here.<sup>20</sup>

The titles of individual films further reveal that perhaps less than half of the total can be considered publicity in the sense of telling a public about the work, program, or services of government. The majority of titles suggest that teaching is the fundamental purpose of the film and that the only publicity connection would appear in the producers' names being presented with the film—a virtue attending all publication, even the most technical. It would be difficult indeed to ascribe a publicity motive to the following titles, lifted at random: "Breeding for More and Bigger Eggs," "Embryology of the Egg," "Shed Lambing in the West," "How To Grow Hogs," "Horses and Bots," "Conveying and Measuring Irrigation Water," "How To Get Rid of Rats," or "Hot-mixed Bituminous Pavements," by the Department of Agriculture.

On the other hand, it is plain that perhaps two hundred of

<sup>19</sup> "Procedure for Obtaining the Loan of Motion Pictures Distributed by Various Government Departments and Agencies," mimeographed (Washington: United States Information Service, May 1, 1937).

<sup>20</sup> From questionnaires returned by these four agencies.



the titles represent films which have a closer connection with the relation between the agency and the public. These titles, with variations depending upon the observer, fall into three major categories of content: (1) films depicting the work and achievements of the agency; (2) films explaining the program of the agency and securing public support of and participation in the program; and (3) films publicizing the facilities offered the public as a result of the agency's work, thus stimulating use of the agency.

The work and achievements of the agency would be shown, it is assumed, in such films as the following: "Agricultural Exploration in Ceylon, Sumatra, and Java," for the Bureau of Plant Industry; "From Ranch to Ranch in California," "Helping Negroes To Become Better Farmers and Homemakers," or "Home Demonstration Work in the Western States," for the Extension Service; "The Civilian Conservation Corps at Work—Arizona" and similar films for Colorado, Wyoming, Oregon and Washington, and Utah and southern Idaho, for the Emergency Conservation Work; a series of twenty one-reel films on the Navy in various parts of the world and on training sailors, for the Recruiting Service of the Navy; two different versions of "The Story of the U.S. Coast Guard," for the Treasury Department; a series of thirteen films on the work of the Works Progress Administration in various states and cities with such titles as "Uncle Sam—Greatest Builder," "We Work Again," "Men against the River," or "Work Pays America" for W.P.A.; or "Flashes of Action," and "Cadet Days" for the War Department. Altogether an estimated eighty-five films of the type indicated by these and similar titles are listed.

Fifty-three titles suggest an effort to tell the audience the reasons for programs and to solicit aid in their administration. The category is represented by the following random examples: "Our Wildlife Resource," "Regulated Deer Hunting," or "Why Save the Elk?" for the Bureau of Biological Survey; a series of thirteen arguments for preventing forest fires, plus "Forests Serve Man" and other films on the desirability for conserva-

tion in the use of forest, for the Forest Service; "The Making of a Safe Miner," "Twelve Points of Safety," or "Learn and Live—Value of First Aid," made by the Bureau of Mines in its effort to reduce mine accidents; or "Today's Frontiers" made by the Social Security Board to explain and secure support for the unemployment compensation provisions of the Social Security Act. A second film was announced by the Social Security Board for July 1, 1937, to show how old age benefits will aid the youth of today.

Films that publicize the facilities provided by the agency seem from the list of titles to come principally from the Federal Housing Administration and National Park Service. Slight exception to this is offered by the Bureau of Public Roads, which has eleven releases on scenic roads in the United States, and by the Forest Service with two films on national forests.<sup>21</sup> These, however, are not the only types produced for the latter two agencies, as in the case of the Federal Housing Administration and National Park Service. Eight one-reel "Federal Housing News Flashes," were produced to encourage building and remodeling of homes when the spending program of the middle 1930's was under way. For the National Park Service, some forty-seven films show the scenic and historical glories of national parks and monuments. Some of the titles are "Seeing Yosemite National Park," "A Visit to Mesa Verde National Park," "Carlsbad Caverns," "White Sands National Monument [New Mexico]," or "Parks under the Lone Star."

Perhaps the more important question concerning government movies is whether the quality of their content is good enough to justify continuing to make the same type. To those who make the pictures the answer seems evident. They regard their task as one of producing the so-called "educational" type of film, and so long as their product is as good as the others in this category, they feel they have succeeded. To an outsider, however, the answer is not so simple. He recognizes, for one

<sup>21</sup> The Bureau of Public Roads also has available nine films on roads in other countries of the world. These are not included in any category in this analysis.

thing, a growing concern on the part of educators and commercial motion-picture producers with the "short-subject" film, and he foresees that most of the present lot of educational films is doomed to oblivion as soon as the present groping for a satisfactory use of the medium is successful.

The commercial producers, spurred on by the hope of profits, have turned to the short subject after a period of considering it a necessary nuisance to fill the time between feature showings and after reducing it at one time, in fact, to the low state of a donation to exhibitors as a premium for taking a weak feature film. The commercial renaissance of the "short" reveals that in the immediate future exposition and comedy are likely to be stressed.<sup>22</sup> The animated cartoon has become a box-office drawing card in itself, and "The March of Time" as a monthly news summary of prominent topics has set a new tone for the film presentation of news.

A second factor, though not one which Hollywood would recognize, is the technical improvements in the field of 16-millimeter motion pictures and the consequent increase in the number of amateurs who are experimenting with teaching and art films. Gradually, no doubt, the effect of this interest among amateurs will be seen in the larger realm of films shown to large private and public audiences.<sup>23</sup>

Of still greater influence on the development of the serious short subject will be the production of documentary films by experienced technicians who are anxious to utilize the medium for a social art.<sup>24</sup> The establishment of Frontier Films by a group of artists and technicians from Hollywood and elsewhere

<sup>22</sup> Douglas W. Churchill, "Hollywood Rediscovered the Short," *New York Times*, July 18, 1937, sec. 10, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Sterling, "Sowing the 16MM Field," *New York Times*, July 25, 1937, sec. 10, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> The term "documentary" has no precise definition. It is used commonly to indicate a film that stresses honesty, simplicity, and realism in treatment, a film that emphasizes conditions rather than individual persons, treats the elements as dramatic characters fully as significant as persons, and records with accuracy a fact, a mood, an object, or an activity in a period of time. Frequently,

was announced in the spring of 1937.<sup>25</sup> By the middle of 1937, it had already completed a living-newspaper presentation of the evictions of tenants from the Sunnyside housing project and had started a film on the La Follette Senate Committee hearings on labor espionage in American industry. Other signs of social viewpoints among technicians who want to make documentary films have also appeared.

The interest of the commercial producer in extending the life of his feature products through use in schools, if it continues to develop, will be still another factor to revise the approach to educational films. Paramount Pictures has had (summer, 1937) Ralph Jester at work for more than a year converting such feature films as "The Plainsman" and "Maid of Salem" into shorter editions to teach the history of the western plains and the home life of the Puritans.<sup>26</sup> This desire to utilize for a longer period the heavy investment in feature films and to determine the educational possibilities of the motion picture also lay behind the reviewing of some 1,500 motion pictures by schoolteachers enlisted by a committee of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors, Incorporated, the "Will Hays" trade association. The outcome of this review was expected to be closer

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though not necessarily, a documentary film is deliberate propaganda. As a theory of art, the word connotes a recognition of the motion picture as a distinct art form rather than as an adaptation of the stage, as in commercial dramatic films, or of the newspaper, as in the newsreels. The camera is accepted as a reporting eye to be used dramatically for emphasis. The conception and production of a true documentary film is a creative process usually limited to one or a few persons and is not amenable to mass-production methods. Therefore the product is seldom seen in commercial theaters which are dominated in their booking by the commercial mass-production studios. Outstanding recent documentary films have been "New Earth" and "Spanish Earth" by Joris Ivens, "Los Redes" by Paul Strand, "Man of Aran" by Robert Flaherty, "Cable Ship" and "B.B.C.: The Voice of Britain" by Stuart Legg for the British Post Office, "Song of Ceylon" by Basil Wright, "The Plow That Broke the Plains" and "The River" for Resettlement Administration. See Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film* (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1936) and "The Films Face Reality," *Story* XII (January, 1938), 67-79.

<sup>25</sup> *New York Times*, April 25, 1937, sec. 10, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Personal interview, June 16, 1937.

co-operation between the commercial producers and the educators in the use of Hollywood films.<sup>27</sup> In a kindred development, the Progressive Education Association during the school session of 1937-38 planned to try specially edited sequences from feature films in seventeen schools and colleges as a means of stressing the social implications of the plots. With the aid of Joris Ivens, an outstanding director of documentary films, the Association's Commission on Human Relations had supervised the editing of nineteen short films by midsummer of 1937 and was planning a total of sixty to be ready by 1938. Six major producing companies were co-operating in this experiment.<sup>28</sup>

The significance for government of the inescapable trend in attention to the short subject is threefold. In the first place, the line between the "publicity" picture and the "educational" film is disappearing, while at the same time the category of informative-persuasive films is becoming distinct in itself as a combination of publicity and teaching. In the future the types of pictures outside the realm of entertainment will include (1) the propaganda film, meaning both publicity shorts and the type of teaching film which is being sought by educators in their adaptations from entertainment features; and (2) the scientific film which is a medium both of research and of reporting. In the second place, the public taste and expectation of excellence will be established by the publicity films which compel the attention of the average man, and not by the moral purpose of the producer of dull educational films, no matter how good his intentions. The obvious conclusion is that government motion-picture publicity must compete with the best informational films and that in the future the government film will probably undergo changes to keep it apace with the others in its field.

This does not mean, fortunately, that government motion-picture producers must hire movie stars at their fabulous salaries and build Gargantuan sets in order to duplicate the

<sup>27</sup> *Time*, XXX, No. 6 (August 9, 1937), 27.

<sup>28</sup> *New York Times*, August 8, 1937, p. 5.

feature films which are now in process of being edited for educational uses. The weapons of competition for government will be the relatively inexpensive but effective ones for which the commercial cinema finds no use: freedom to discuss ideas and conditions, freedom for the artist to create without pressure from the businessman's conception of art, and economical preoccupation with simple things and persons instead of dealing always in a make-believe world where every set must be invested with glamour. The advantage of the government movie of the future will rest, in short, in making films of the "documentary" type which appeal to wide audiences for their quality of dramatizing commonplace subjects and for presenting lucidly the social problems of the day.

Documentary . . . has no individualised story, no much-publicized star and none of the rich trappings and expensive flim-flams of the story film. . . . Documentary relies exclusively on the belief that there is nothing so interesting to ourselves as ourselves. It depends on the individual's interest in the world around him. It bases its appeal on the community's undeniable zest for getting about the world and, more difficult, on the drama of events that lies at one's own doorstep. If there are human beings they are secondary to the main theme. Their private passions and petulances are of little interest. For the most part they perform their natural behavior as in normal life. The dramatisation and characterisation lie not in their hands but in the method of the director. They are types selected from the many, portraying the mind and character of this or that social group. If there are spectacular scenes, they again are only present because they are typical and because they develop naturally from the subject. . . .<sup>29</sup>

The audience appeal of a good documentary film depends upon the makers' artistry in using the camera dramatically on commonplace scenes and events, in the rhythm of movement, in the tempo and unity of cutting, in the photographer's skill, and in the appropriate union of sound with image.<sup>30</sup> The dramatic reporting of fact can easily compete with the more expensive presentation of fiction.

Gradually the acceptance of this development of the camera

<sup>29</sup> Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 142.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. iv.

as a reporting medium which also dramatizes and convinces is appearing in public agencies. In Great Britain, in fact, this use of the film was in the beginning exclusively the work of government agencies.<sup>31</sup> Among the federal government films in the United States, "The Plow That Broke the Plains" and "The River" made for Resettlement Administration represent a conscious, deliberate documentary approach to explaining the reasons for the program and practices of administrative agencies. The theme of "The Plow" is man's misuse of the plains land and the resulting disastrous dust storms. The purpose is to show why something had to be done for the people living in the dry region. The camera was handled in this instance by artists who saw their task as one of recording a condition. The director was a student and critic of the cinema who saw the need for dramatizing the subject by the use of the camera, by cutting, by movement, rather than by creating a pseudo drama which a static camera could photograph. The sound was an integral part of the production, so essential, in fact, that neither it nor the pictures would have been as effective if left alone. A conscious social viewpoint was implicit in the theme. The makers believed in the humanitarian purpose of the Resettlement Administration, believed that a social use of the land was preferable to dangerous exploitation by greedy plowing and planting, and they did not obscure their belief by an evasive treatment of the subject. "The River" dealt with water erosion and floods in the same dramatic manner of reporting. Through a blend of image, music, and the spoken lines of a prose poem the audience was identified with deforestation, with single-crop farming, and with the human misery of hunger on ruined land. The film closes with a suggestion that dam-building in relation to power production and social rehabilitation offers the solution. Both these films received unanimous praise

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-111, 245-61; and "The Films Face Reality," *Story*, XII, No. 66 (January, 1938), pp. 67-79; also Thomas Baird, "Films and the Public Services in Great Britain," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, II, No. 1 (January, 1938), 96-99.

from the critics.<sup>32</sup> They could compete without shame with any commercial short, and, more important, they were shown to large numbers in commercial theaters. If the signs of trends discussed above mean anything, one may conclude that such documentary films as these point the way for all federal publicity movies of the future, if they are to succeed in attracting attention in the field of the impending informational short subject.

This discussion has dealt only with the deliberate efforts of government agencies to present their messages through the motion picture. In passing it should be noted again that much movie publicity is accidental, appearing in commercial feature films which glorify the armed and police services, in occasional commercial short subjects, and in the newsreels. The most casual observer is familiar with the general pattern of content in the feature films of the services. Two plots are favorites: A poor sport has to be disciplined into becoming a hero when the crisis comes; two pals love the same girl, break up their friendship, then in the crisis one saves the other's life. These events take place in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, in Annapolis, or in West Point. These agencies have been willing to co-operate with the producers whenever legitimate, since the resulting picture has always been favorable publicity. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has also been ready to co-operate in both photoplays and shorts, even to the extent of the Director's doing a small bit before the camera in one nonfictional short.<sup>33</sup> Such film attention is limited to the violent services of

<sup>32</sup> Critical reaction was collected by the Information Division of Resettlement Administration and is available in its files. "The Plow" was classed among the best films of 1936 and was placed in both an American and an international collection of significant films. "The River" was given special praise by the Committee on Exceptional Photoplays of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures in its choice of the best films of 1937 (*New York Times*, December 18, 1937, p. 18).

<sup>33</sup> "You Can't Get Away with It." On the opening day in Washington's Keith's Theater, this film was advertised: "A scoop added attraction . . . J. EDGAR HOOVER and his Gang Busting G-Men Themselves in Action! Thrilling! Exciting! Facts not Fiction . . .! Presented with the permission of



government and cannot be taken as typical of government publicity. The newsreel represents the same type of medium as the newspaper, for it is primarily no more than a transposition to the screen of news illustration. To this extent, it is not used by government publicity offices in the distinctive and controlled way in which educational films are used, although it is useful in connection with reporting events in administration.

#### RADIO

Twenty-seven of the federal agencies which answered the questionnaire prepare speeches for the radio. Ten prepare the script for studio dramas; twelve prepare script for studio interviews; eleven prepare script for news broadcasts; and two make disk transcriptions of dramas. In general, these replies conform to the practices found by the National Emergency Council when it surveyed the uses of radio by government agencies in 1936, a year earlier.<sup>34</sup>

During the four months of January, February, June, and July, 1937, ten regular feature programs originating in government agencies were being presented on national chain networks. The Office of Education Federal Radio Project was staging "Let Freedom Ring," a series based upon the Bill of Rights; "The World Is Yours," dramatic sketches about exhibits in the Smithsonian Institution; "Have You Heard?" on curiosities of science; and "Education in the News." The Department of Agriculture arranged and staged a daily feature in "The Farm and Home Hour" which included a variety of discussion, information, and dramatic reporting of various federal activities concerning farmers. The Department of Commerce had a weekly feature giving in lecture form the history and significance of various American industries and promoting public

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Hon. Homer S. Cummings, Attorney-General of the U.S. and with the cooperation of J. Edgar Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice" (*Washington Daily News*, January 22, 1937, p. 33).

<sup>34</sup> "National Emergency Council Radio Survey," a chart filed in the Office of the U.S. Information Service, Washington.

approval for the industries and use of their products.<sup>35</sup> Secretaries of the federal departments were discussing their work and policies in a "Cabinet Series." The Army, Navy, and Marine bands had each its regular broadcast time.

In addition to these regular programs of government origin, two features of reference to government were to be found in "Junior G-Men," which kept the fame of the Federal Bureau of Investigation alive in the minds of the young, and "Don Winslow of the Navy," which made a naval hero, albeit fictitious, a regular home visitor under romantic circumstances.

During the same four months, eighty-eight miscellaneous programs were presented by government agencies or agents or were in reference to the work of government. The subject matter, as indicated by the titles, ranged from entertainment to serious lectures on scientific subjects. Table 3 shows the distribution of programs according to content.<sup>36</sup>

The miscellaneous radio program, especially arranged for one broadcast, constituted roughly one-half of the total time given to federal administration by the national networks, the total of regular feature programs being around eighty in comparison to the eighty-eight special programs. Since these miscellaneous programs were often talks by federal officials, any effort to estimate their effectiveness in content would involve a knowledge of the popularity of "talks" and the various broad subjects usually presented in "talks." Cantril and Allport in one of the more extensive efforts to measure radio audience taste found that combined men and women of all ages ranked "educational talks" ninth in forty-two types of content. Chosen ahead of educational talks were old song favorites, dance orchestras, news events, symphonies, football, drama, humor-

<sup>35</sup> Several of these talks are collected in U.S. Department of Commerce, *Stories of American Industry* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937).

<sup>36</sup> All titles are from the daily radio log of the *New York Times* during the months January, February, June, and July, 1937. National network programs in this log are those broadcast from WABC, Columbia Broadcasting System; WAAF, National Broadcasting Company Red Network; WJZ, National Broadcasting Company Blue Network; and WOR, Mutual Broadcasting System.

ists, and sports. Among the topics which at various times formed the content of talks originating in federal administrative offices and which were included in the Cantril-Allport schedule of forty-two preferences were health (ranked fifteenth), national policies and history (ranked eighteenth), educational methods (ranked twenty-fourth), engineering (ranked twenty-ninth), and political speeches (ranked fortieth).<sup>37</sup>

TABLE 3  
SUBJECT CONTENT OF EIGHTY-EIGHT MISCELLANEOUS NETWORK  
BROADCAST PROGRAMS BY FEDERAL AGENCIES  
IN FOUR MONTHS OF 1937

Type of Content	15- Minute Program	30- Minute Program	1-Hour Program	Total Number Programs by Type of Content
Discussion, problems, and policies.....	23	2	.....	25
Work of the agency.....	12	3	.....	15
Facts from research.....	9	.....	.....	9
Explaining agency's program.....	9	1	.....	10
Feature stories or entertainment.....	5	4	4	13
Efforts to influence legislation or policy..	3	1	.....	4
Honoring or featuring personnel*.....	1	.....	1†	2
Ceremonial observances.....	3	1	.....	4
Not classifiable.....	6	.....	.....	6
Total programs by time.....	71	12	5	88

\* Does not include one minute of silence on all chains for the deceased chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.

† A 45-minute program.

The first conclusion to be drawn is that the radio drama programs staged by government in its regular features are a better use of the medium, from the standpoint of reception of content by the mass audience, than the talk program. Drama is ranked sixth in forty-two choices, while educational talks rank ninth. With the slight exception of the musical and theatrical programs by service bands and actors on relief, the federal publicity agent seeking to use the radio can hardly break into the

<sup>37</sup> Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport, *The Psychology of Radio* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1935), pp. 89-95.

types of program at the top in popularity.<sup>38</sup> It would be rare indeed for administrative publicity to be planned in the form of "old song favorites," "dance orchestras," "symphonies," "football," "humorists," or "sports," all of which precede "educational talks" in popularity.

The government agencies, in other words, follow the most effective available selection of types of program in combining drama and talks. Both types rank fairly high in popularity. Both should be used, since overdoing one would tend to reduce its popularity by making it monotonous.

Closely related to the content of a radio program is the length of time it stays on the air, both because the radio audience is most independent and can change its program with a mere twist of the dial and because the psychology of listening determines limits of effectiveness. In laboratory experiments Cantril and Allport concluded that the optimum time of effective presentation of educational talks was seventeen minutes; of political talks, twenty-one minutes; and of drama, twenty-eight minutes.<sup>39</sup> The practice of dividing the hour into quarters for broadcasting in the United States means that the most effective program must occupy a time-length in the quarter-hour closest to the recommended optimum. In general, the programs originating in federal administrative agencies conform to the most effective psychological time-length. Among

<sup>38</sup> This is not true of "news events," which rank third in popularity according to the Cantril-Allport findings. News broadcasts on national networks are so closely tied to newspaper coverage of the news, by virtue of the press-radio agreement, that they cannot be considered as particularly a property of the radio as a medium of publicity. The attention here has been given to the use of the radio as a specialized type of medium, hence the appearance of government publicity in radio news broadcasts on the national networks has been omitted. Certain of the federal agencies get local radio time for news broadcasts, but such fillin material is not typical of the material used in time given on the national networks. Furthermore, Cantril and Allport (*ibid.*, p. 98) found that almost nine-tenths of listeners prefer network to local broadcasts. This indicates that network programs are more significant than local broadcasts for government publicity purposes.

<sup>39</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 200-203.

the regular features, the dramatic "Let Freedom Ring" and "The World Is Yours" are thirty-minute; "Education in the News," "Have You Heard?" and the Department of Commerce talks on industry are fifteen-minute programs. Devoting thirty minutes to each Cabinet member in the series of Cabinet talks might be questioned when the optimum for educational talks is seventeen minutes and for political talks, twenty-one minutes. The full sixty-minute "Farm and Home Hour" might also be questioned, if it were not for the fact that this program presents a daily variety of music, talk, interviews, and sometimes drama and cannot be placed under a single category.

Among the miscellaneous programs (Table 3) the time-length of talks is predominantly fifteen minutes, which conforms to the best practice as measured by psychological effectiveness.

Unfortunately, the categories of content in the radio programs of federal agencies do not coincide any further than in type of program and time-length with the classification which research reports have followed in the analyses of audience preferences. Within the limits of this general description of federal administrative publicity on the radio, no extensive firsthand analysis of content can be attempted. No test of such technical factors as length of sentences, types of words, speed of delivery, or use of symbols can be made short of prolonged research among scripts, recordings, and in laboratory tests. The approach to perfection among federal radio publicists will depend in part upon such exact inspection of current techniques and subject matter, and both empirical observation and laboratory experiment are to be recommended to government as well as to all other workers in the field of radio.

Another recommendation that the observer from outside cannot avoid making is that government and private radio program-makers might well spend part of their time in considering and testing possible undiscovered ways both of selecting the content for programs and of presenting it to the microphone. The fact that the medium is in its infancy, even though

a precocious infancy, cannot be overlooked.<sup>40</sup> So far, it has borrowed from the stage for its entertainment and from the stage, newspaper, and lecture platform for its presentation of information. A government agency, the Federal Radio Project of the Office of Education, has taken the lead in adapting drama to the presentation of information. Perhaps a government agency will eventually discover a new and significant type of program that will be unique to radio and its predicted younger brother, television. The groping for more effective ways of using the radio for informational purposes is apparent in all discussions among educators interested in radio.<sup>41</sup>

#### MISCELLANEOUS MEDIA

While by far the most attention is given by the typical federal administrative publicity office to releases for the great media of mass circulation discussed so far, federal agencies also receive some reference from the various other media in common use. In some cases the publicity office is directly responsible for the attention; in others it merely serves passively to make use of publicity instigated by a nonpublicity official or by an outsider. The extent to which the publicity offices deliberately make use of the miscellaneous media is shown in replies to the questionnaires. Twenty-four of the total of forty-four which answered prepare illustrated pamphlets; fourteen prepare pamphlets without illustrations. These are pamphlets designed to attract a general audience without being solicited. The figures do not include annual reports nor purely instructional and technical publications. Twelve offices prepare traveling exhibits; twenty-one prepare special exhibits. Nine make

<sup>40</sup> The history of radio broadcasting is discussed in U.S. National Resources Committee, *Technological Trends and National Policy* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), pp. 17-18, 223-29; a chronological summary of important developments after 1921 is in the *New York Times*, May 23, 1937, sec. 10, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> See especially the papers in any annual volume of Levering Tyson (ed.), *Radio and Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) or Bureau of Educational Research, Radio Division, Ohio State University, *Education on the Air* (Columbus: University of Ohio).

film-strips. Five use posters of type only, and twelve use illustrated posters. These numbers, however, do not include all the media which are used from time to time because, in the first place, frank disclosure of some practices, such as ghost-writing speeches and books, might get the publicity official into trouble; and, in the second place, the use of some of the lesser miscellaneous media is too slight to justify retelling here.

In considering miscellaneous media in detail, one finds that practice varies widely. The use of *pamphlets* is a case in point. Small indeed is the federal agency that does not have some sort of printed or processed pamphlet telling what it does and how to use its services. These range, however, from a plain, unadorned page of small type to a book richly illustrated with photographs and colored charts. Even an annual report, in at least one instance, was made a publicity brochure and designed to attract the reader's attention with a colored picture-map dust cover.<sup>42</sup>

Since the content of a pamphlet can be controlled by the agency and the audience can be identified to a slight degree through an analysis of the mailing list or letter requests, the pamphlet has been used mainly to explain the work of the agency. Incidental to explaining the work and program is, of course, the enlistment of support for the agency, though this purpose is seldom stated in obvious language by government publicity offices.

*Exhibits* have been used to tell the public about the work of government and to explain the reasons for certain programs. The contemporary period of large expositions and costly federal buildings in which all major federal agencies have displays of their work was inaugurated with the Century of Progress at Chicago in 1933. There in a white, blue, black, and gilt hall the 15,500,000 visitors—more than entered any other Fair building—saw curios, watched sample processes such as minting coins, examined the instruments of government's job by play-

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Resettlement Administration, *First Annual Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936).

ing with naval guns or lighthouse lamps, saw dioramas of national parks and farm conditions, studied numerous animated maps, learned what their fellow-citizens in island possessions were like, were fingerprinted for identification purposes, studied models of an air-beacon and coast-light system or of Boulder Dam and power plant. Even such a paper-work agency as the State Department mustered a compelling exhibit consisting of a world-map with flashing lights to show the location of diplomatic and consular offices, samples of diplomatic correspondence and ceremonial letters, documents showing the steps in amending the Constitution and in making a law, gifts traditionally given by the President to officers and men of foreign ships that rescue American citizens on the high seas, sample treaties, and a model of the United States government building in Paris. The agencies of more vigorous and outdoor activities could, of course, easily make a show with models, motion pictures, and displays of equipment. The exhibits throughout the building were a combination of teaching the public facts gathered by the agencies and of telling the public, sometimes directly and sometimes by implication, what the government did in its routine, day-to-day work.<sup>43</sup>

Similar federal exhibits were arranged for the California-Pacific Exposition, the Texas Centennial, and the Great Lakes Exposition, following the Century of Progress, and apparently if the nation continues to be as addicted to large fairs as it has been for the past few years, such large-scale exhibits will be for some time an important avenue for federal publicity to reach the mass public. Instead of the bare million appropriated by Congress for the Century of Progress or the Texas Centennial federal exhibits, \$3,000,000 is being spent in New York plus, if the Fair's publicity hopes materialize, a visit of the fleet

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Congress, *A Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, 1933, Senate Document No. 174* (73d Cong., 2d sess. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934]), a detailed statement of expenditures, with other reports concerning the character and extent of federal participation in a Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago during the year 1933; also a visit to the exhibits and notes made at the time.



and a review of a hundred warships in New York Harbor. San Francisco's biggest-of-all Fair is occurring the same year. The Fleet, according to West Coast hopes, will go there after appearing in New York.<sup>44</sup>

Such colossal displays, while apparently becoming an established convention, are not the only exhibits for federal agencies. In Washington and in some field stations displays are often found in the lobbies and show windows of buildings housing administrative offices. It cannot be said that buildings devoted to administrative functions attract the major portion of tourists in Washington, but those tourists who do go through these buildings for sightseeing or for business can frequently see exhibits by the agencies.<sup>45</sup>

A conducted tour through an agency at work is an extension of the lobby display. The Bureau of Printing and Engraving has long been a prominent point on a tour of Washington, while the adoption of the conducted tour by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the Department of Justice has polished this medium into an example of deft showmanship which reaches large numbers of visitors. Tours are started at regular intervals from the reception room of the Director's suite, a room, incidentally, which has a display case filled with the gruesome relics of late bandits and a large rack of newspaper cartoons praising the G-men. From this beginning, the throng is led through another exhibit room with much the same sort of display as would be found at a fair, then through various offices of the Bureau, where identification files, laboratory detection, and the gymnasium training are explained, and finally through a voluntary fingerprinting with a souvenir copy of the print bestowed

<sup>44</sup> *New York Times*, July 24, 1937, p. 13; August 6, 1937, p. 1; September 12, 1937, sec. 2, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> The zoo was reported to have the largest number of visitors in Washington during the summer of 1937. The ranking was: zoo, 806,300 persons; Lincoln Memorial, 656,354; Lindbergh's plane in the Smithsonian Institution, 481,028; Washington Monument, 416,408; and General Robert E. Lee's home, 293,904. No record was kept for the chambers of Congress or for the shrine of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, but officials estimated that these lagged far behind the zoo in popularity (*ibid.*, September 25, 1937, p. 7).

as a continuing reminder of the tour. "The tourists also get the impression that the F.B.I. has been responsible for the solution of most of the recent major crimes," says one reporter.<sup>46</sup>

Exhibits at meetings and small fairs are another important means of reaching special audiences. The National Aviation Show in New York City in the winter of 1937 had, for example, an exhibit of Works Progress Administration on its program of airport construction, a Navy booth in which spectators could have their eyesight tested, an experimental autogyro displayed by the Bureau of Air Commerce, a display by the Post Office promoting the use of air mail, and a Seversky pursuit plane contributed by the Army.<sup>47</sup> The New York Museum of Science and Industry arranged during 1937 a series of exhibits of federal projects.<sup>48</sup> Exhibits by federal agencies similar in nature to these examples from New York alone are common in smaller fairs in other cities throughout the country.

Certain government projects lend themselves to exhibit uses by their very prominence and news value. Thus Greenbelt, the

<sup>46</sup> Jack Alexander, "Profiles—the Director," *New Yorker*, September 25, 1937, p. 21. The present writer took the tour in January, 1937, and found much the same exhibit as Alexander found, with the exception of the voluntary fingerprinting, which Alexander reports. The three articles by Alexander on J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (*ibid.*, September 25, October 2, and October 9, 1937) provide a cogent discussion of the Director's publicity ideas and practices.

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937; and "The Aviation Show," *New Yorker*, February 6, 1937, pp. 32–38. The *New Yorker's* reporter was amused by the Army exhibit. "There was a great to-do," he wrote, "when the Army came, bringing in a new Seversky pursuit plane. The soldiers went about assembling it tight-lipped, and hoisted it more than head high, in a corner of the ground floor. Then they proceeded to hang all around it and over it yards and yards of gauze, so that when they had finished, it could be only dimly seen. That, it was announced, was because it was a secret. I asked an officer why they bothered to bring it at all, then, and he said because it was good publicity. All through the opening session, people tried to peer through the gauze. They asked what the plane was, were told that it was a government secret, and went away snickering. On Friday, the gauze was removed and the plane revealed; except that its cockpit windows and windshield were soaped, for secrecy, it looked to me like any Seversky pursuit plane. Signs were put up requesting you not to ask the guards too many questions."

<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, April 21, 1937, p. 24.

low-cost suburban housing and community project of Resettlement Administration in Maryland outside of the District of Columbia drew during construction a continual stream of visitors because it was an attractive answer to the problem of sub-standard housing and because it was to be a ready-made community without the usual civic troubles. Visitors were guided into the project by signs placed along the highway. Once arrived, they found special parking space reserved exclusively for them. A group of typical houses had been completed first, fully furnished by the Special Skills Division, and arranged for inspection. In one room, the last on the tour, were maps of the community and surrounding country, samples of building materials and construction, and photographs and drawings of the type of community life that was to be the lot of residents. Special parties could have a guide. A similar exhibit on the spot was arranged by the Public Works Administration for its Williamsburg housing project in Brooklyn when it placed three furnished apartments on display for a period of nine weeks.<sup>49</sup> It is almost typical that other large outdoor public-works projects, such as dams, have some provision for visitors.

The *strip-film*, as another of these miscellaneous media, may be used effectively in combination with a lecture or exhibit. It can be made from any subject matter which lends itself to photography, for the strip-film is nothing more than still photographs edited in sequence and printed on a continuous film rather than on separate slides. Voice or music accompaniment can be added if the projection equipment is available.

A common use of the *poster* is to mark projects. This is, in fact, mandatory with some agencies, such as Works Progress Administration,<sup>50</sup> or Resettlement Administration, the latter prescribing in detail the specifications for size, color, and type of lettering on signs to be placed where they will be seen by the largest number of people.<sup>51</sup> The poster has also proved effec-

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, July 24, 1937, p. 32.

<sup>50</sup> *Handbook of Procedures for State and District Works Progress Administrators* (Washington: Government Printing Office, May 15, 1936), chap. x, sec. 23.

<sup>51</sup> An administrative order, July 24, 1936.

tive, as reported by various publicity officers, in getting cooperation in such campaigns as fire prevention or soil conservation; in selling the services of the agency, as when the Federal Housing Administration used small posters, large paste-sheet billboards, and streetcar cards in promoting home-building and remodeling with insured loans; or in advertising the facilities offered by the agency, as in the publicizing of national parks. The armed services use posters extensively for recruiting, though this is not considered a function of the publicity office.<sup>52</sup>

*Books* as a medium for government information present a mystery, so far as knowing whether they have their origin in a publicity office or in the author named. Certainly, it would be against the ethics of the ghost writers' profession (and many publicity men are called upon to ghostwrite occasionally) to tell that the book published under the name of an official was really the work of a publicity agent. Furthermore, the final result may be actually more a collaboration than a pure matter of ghostwriting. Whatever the origin, it is apparent that some books have served to inform their limited publics about the work, problems, policies, and procedures of several federal agencies. A casual survey of recent book notices reveals, as examples, *This New America, the Spirit of the Civilian Conservation Corps*, edited by Alfred C. Oliver, Jr., and Harold M. Dudley, with forewords by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and others;<sup>53</sup> *Technology, Corporations and the General Welfare*, by Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace;<sup>54</sup> *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis*, by Surgeon-General Thomas Parran of the United States Public Health Service;<sup>55</sup> *Sentinel of the Coasts, the Log of a Lighthouse Engineer*, by George R. Putnam, Commissioner of Lighthouses, retired;<sup>56</sup> *The United States Army in*

<sup>52</sup> "Public Relations," *U.S. Army Regulations 600-700* (Washington: Government Printing Office, April 18, 1935), 3b.

<sup>53</sup> New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1937. Pp. 188.

<sup>54</sup> Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937. Pp. 83.

<sup>55</sup> New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937. Pp. 309.

<sup>56</sup> New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1937. Pp. 368.

*War and Peace*, by Colonel Oliver Lyman Spaulding;<sup>57</sup> *The Reserve Banks and the Money Market*, by W. Randolph Burgess of the New York Reserve Bank, with an Introduction by George L. Harrison, President, Federal Reserve Bank of New York;<sup>58</sup> *Prison Life Is Different*, by James A. Johnston, Warden of Alcatraz Prison;<sup>59</sup> *Federal Justice*, by Attorney-General Homer S. Cummings and Special Assistant Carl McFarland;<sup>60</sup> *Coast Guard to the Rescue*, by Karl Baarslag;<sup>61</sup> and *Dear Mr. President*, selected letters written to the President by citizens, compiled by Ben Whitehurst, former Chief of the Correspondence Division of Federal Emergency Relief Administration and Works Progress Administration.<sup>62</sup> All these books were reviewed in the metropolitan press during the first three quarters of 1937. No doubt a further exploration would uncover many more titles of books written by government officials about their work and problems. The book offers an exceptional opportunity for discussing such matters with complete control over what is to be said. Less under control but equally effective when in the hands of friends are the books by outsiders who get a part of their information from the agency's publicity office. The federal publicity agents in Washington are, as a rule, generous with their time and services to authors of books about problems and policies of government in fields of administration.

The *public address* is probably the oldest means of mass appeal known to propagandists. It is not overlooked by the Washington publicity men. The busiest federal official must admit that appearing at conventions of special groups, talking to mass meetings, or appearing before influential civic groups is an essential part of his role as a public servant. As a corollary, every federal publicity official must be adept at writing an

<sup>57</sup> New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937.

<sup>58</sup> New York: Harper & Bros., 1937. Rev. ed. Pp. 342.

<sup>59</sup> New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937.

<sup>60</sup> New York: Macmillan Co., 1937.

<sup>61</sup> New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937. Pp. 328.

<sup>62</sup> New York: Dutton & Co., 1937.

effective speech for the "name" official to give, since the busy executive usually has no time for more than an outline statement of what he wants to say and the speech-writer must do the necessary research and polish the text for final delivery. The usefulness of the speech as a medium will vary with the subject and with the audience to be reached. Unless broadcast by the radio, the address is not a medium for wide distribution, although in some cases, if released to the newspapers, it may be the origin of a news story that will carry far through other media. The typical speech by a federal administrative official is delivered to a small audience composed of persons with a special interest in the subject. A Department of Agriculture official talks to a farmers' meeting; a Farm Credit Administration representative talks to a meeting of co-operators; the Attorney-General and the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation talk to assembled police chiefs; the Administrator of Rural Electrification Administration talks to a State Farm Bureau meeting; or the Federal Alcohol Administrator talks to assembled distillers. In those agencies with regional and sub-regional offices, quite small meetings may be sought as outlets for informative speeches by either an official or by some citizen well versed in the work of the agency. The instruction sheet issued by the Informational Service of the Social Security Board states:

A Speakers Service should be set up in each regional office in co-operation with the Speakers Service in Washington. It should be the function of this service: (a) to develop a very select list of persons who, through intimate knowledge of the Act and its administration, experience and personality, are well qualified to address public meetings on the subject; (b) to encourage inclusion of social security in the programs of *all organizations* whose membership should be better informed concerning the Act.<sup>63</sup>

The content of any speech can be suited to the occasion, hence a wide variety of subject matter can be found in the preserved texts of speeches. Some warn the client in matters of

<sup>63</sup> "Preliminary Outline of Responsibilities of Regional Informational Service Representatives," mimeographed, File No. 175 (italics supplied).

enforcement; others explain the problems faced by the agency in administering an act; some report factually the progress made by the agency; some discuss the objectives of particular legislation and its administration; others urge hearers to cooperate with officials or to take advantages of services offered by government; and some teach lessons appropriate to the work of the agency.<sup>64</sup>

*Lecture-demonstrations, tours, and study groups* have found some use among certain federal offices. The Bureau of Mines, for instance, has staged programs for several coal-mining institutes on activities in promoting safety.<sup>65</sup> The National Park Service has found lectures combined with pictures and usually with inspections of sites by hikes or from observation points an effective form of publicity. A few years ago, special attention was given to choosing guides who would be good explainers and to training them in the topics they were to discuss.<sup>66</sup> The Forest Service reports that it finds personally conducted tours of the national forests and field demonstrations in farm forestry the most effective of all media for its purposes.<sup>67</sup>

Still other minor and miscellaneous media have been used by some agencies. The National Park Service has utilized envelopes to carry colored stickers advertising the various parks and also to carry a slogan, "A National Park Year," printed in red on the envelope below the return address in the upper left-hand corner. This agency was also fortunate in having a special postage-stamp issue to celebrate National Parks Year in 1934. The idea for the issue is reported to have started with Secretary of the Interior Harold M. Ickes and to have been approved by the President, who chose the colors for the stamps. Both Secretary Ickes and the President were stamp collectors

<sup>64</sup> From an examination, over a year, of copies of speeches sent out as press releases.

<sup>65</sup> Press release, July 2, 1937.

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Annual Report, 1934* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), p. 180.

<sup>67</sup> From reply to questionnaire.

and swappers. The defunct National Recovery Administration also had a stamp issue during the high fever of the early New Deal before the National Industrial Recovery Act was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.<sup>68</sup> Resettlement Administration made wide use of transparencies to be placed on windows and doors of all rooms occupied by the agency. Among the forty-four agencies studied, two have their own special colors, and thirteen have emblems or symbols unique to themselves.<sup>69</sup>

In closing this chapter, reference must be made to the opening pages, wherein, for purposes of introduction, a conclusion was stated: that the federal publicity offices are limited in their choice of channels of publicity by the prevailing conception of the proper role for them to play and that at this time they are not using all of the numerous possible channels which carry messages to the public. The intervening examination of their use of media demonstrates by omission the limits of the conscious scope of administrative publicity. Rumor and gossip, a familiar form of attack against administrative policy, is not a medium for the administrative publicist. Special songs, special clubs, drama, art, and personal pressure are not used generally. This is not to say that some of these media may not be used in government public relations broadly defined, for certainly the personal message or the club have been important notably in the Department of Agriculture's Extension Service, but it is a restatement of the fact that the publicity office as a unit within the administrative agency is not deliberately using such media. The publicity office has chosen, instead, to enter chiefly the media of mass appeal and to supplement this outlet with the use of miscellaneous media of smaller circulation.

Another point to be remarked in reviewing the choice of media and content is that government administrative pub-

<sup>68</sup> Kent B. Stiles, "Our No. 1 Stamp Collector," *New York Times Magazine*, September 26, 1937, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> From replies to questionnaires.



licity is not crisis propaganda in the sense of being directed toward a basic change in the composition of the state.<sup>70</sup> It is, rather, a milder continuous representation of the aims and practices of the permanent bureaucracy to the public. As such, it feels no need to utilize the entire scope of channels of communication and also it finds, in the main, no overwhelming hostility on the part of the privately owned media of mass communication. Thus, while the federal administrative agency is confining itself to news releases about facts it has learned from research or statements of its policies and achievements in a realm that is not a threat to the interests of the owners, it will be given space in newspapers for its publicity. When it oversteps this line and enters, as say the Food and Drug Administration might do in exposing advertising fraud—an argument that is considered dangerous to private enterprise—the press as a medium is closed to government publicity. The conclusion is that if the federal administrative publicist ever wants to say something “dangerous” in pursuit of his duty to publicize the work of his agency, he would find closed to his approach practically all the media which he now primarily uses. The present choice of emphasizing the mass media, in other words, is made possible by the sufferance of the owners of these media for publicity that does not attack private vested interests.

The use of media, then, is limited by the scope of the function assigned to the publicity office as a part of the agency and also by the inability to say anything hostile to private interests in the mass media which carry most of government publicity. Within the uses as established, some conclusions regarding the value of particular media for particular types of content will be made in chapter viii.

<sup>70</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, “The Study and Practice of Propaganda,” in Lasswell, Ralph D. Casey, and Bruce Lannes Smith, *Propaganda and Promotional Activities, an Annotated Bibliography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1935), pp. 14–20.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL PUBLICITY

IF THE control by the publicity office over content is an important factor in the choice of media, as concluded in the preceeding chapter, it is equally significant in a description of how the office gets its releases into those media which it chooses. Since the publicity agent uses predominantly the privately owned media of mass circulation, he must follow a method of distribution which conforms to the practices of the media.<sup>1</sup> Thus the media used by government agents may be divided always into the large categories of (1) privately owned media and (2) those which government may purchase and control without compromise. In the first category are newspapers, periodicals, newsreels, and commercial motion-picture exhibitions of government films. In the second are government films exhibited privately on request to small groups, books written by officials, exhibits, posters, speeches, and the various other miscellaneous media. In between the two major categories lie the radio and some of the commercial feature motion pictures made with the co-operation of government, the first because it operates by permission of government and is subject to public regulation and the second because government may reserve the right to censor a film when the facilities of government are used in its production.<sup>2</sup>

#### DISTRIBUTION TO PRIVATELY OWNED MEDIA

When the release is unquestioned news of interest to a wide audience, the government publicity agent can get space in

<sup>1</sup> The term "distribution" is used to designate the process of getting releases into media. The quantitative scope of the audience reached by a release after it has been distributed is its "circulation."

<sup>2</sup> The Army, for example, may censor any film made with the co-operation of its personnel or using its equipment ("Photoplays," *U.S. Army Regulations 600-700* [Washington: Government Printing Office, April 18, 1935], 7 [3] [c], pars. 11-12).

privately owned media with relative ease. The various collectors of news in Washington will demand the right to print the release or to broadcast it or perhaps to interview the chief participant in the event for the newsreels. Accordingly, most government publicity agents have adopted the wise policy of emphasizing only the stories with genuine news value as that value is defined by the current practices of the media.

"If what is prepared is news," says the Director of Information for Farm Credit Administration, "it is likely to be printed. If it is not news it probably will not be printed despite the kindly feeling of the editor for co-operative credit associations."<sup>3</sup> He then enumerates some of the items which are news of credit co-operatives for local papers, including actions of the board of directors, annual meetings of stockholders, election of officers and directors, names whenever possible but only in connection with some word about farm credit associations, visits of field officials to the community, sales of farms, increases or decreases in the number of applications for loans, variations in the interest rate, statements and comments by officials. The publicity director of Public Works Administration reports:

One of our offices puts out a written story on each bid advertised, on each contract let, on each construction job started and on each job completed in the state and each one of those stories is printed by a press that is, generally speaking, editorially in opposition to our program.<sup>4</sup>

The primary outlet for most such news is, of course, the daily newspaper because it is organized best to capture the fugitive item. In some instances the radio news broadcasters add to the circulation of the item after it has been gathered by the press. Distribution to the press is, in routine practice, a simple matter of laying the release on a table in a press room or outer office of the agency, of sending the release by messenger

<sup>3</sup> "Remarks by E. B. Reid before the Joint Meeting of National Farm Loan Association and Production Credit Association Officials at Louisville, November 6, 1935" (from the files of Farm Credit Association, Office of Information).

<sup>4</sup> "Remarks of Michael W. Straus, Assistant to the Administrator, on 'Publicity Policy' before the State Directors" (File P.W. 49818, Public Works Administration, Information Office [Washington, undated]).

to some one hundred and fifty Washington correspondents who can reach the entire nation with their dispatches, or, if the item is of regional news interest only, of giving the release to the Washington reporters for the particular region. For news of any value the reporter in person receives the release, and the mailed-out press release is typically insignificant as a means of distribution to daily newspapers.

An agency whose news is almost invariably in demand is the Federal Bureau of Investigation, dealing as it does with gunplay and romantic detective work. It will serve as an example of the use of the press room by a director of information when news is demanded. Reporters from the major press wire services (Associated Press, United Press, International News Service) are present in the press room of the Department of Justice at nearly any hour of the day. If a story breaks, the Director of Information for the Department calls all reporters present into his office and makes the announcement. If it is a story of major importance, the Director will notify any press service not represented and will wait until its agent arrives before making the announcement. The releases through the press services take the first interest off the story, but the remaining interest is utilized in some cases by a release prepared for about seventy-five Washington correspondents of metropolitan newspapers throughout the country. This release is delivered by messenger soon after the press wire service reporters have been notified in person. If the story is of regional interest, a release will be sent only to those Washington correspondents for papers in the region. Only at the last, when all immediate facilities of distribution have been exhausted, will a release be mailed out directly to newspapers and interested persons.<sup>5</sup>

Other agencies follow more or less the same plan for distributing "spot news," as distinct from news of long-lasting interest which might be used locally and therefore might be sent by mail to individual newspapers. National Resources Committee prepares some thirty copies of a release on spot

<sup>5</sup> Personal interview, February 2, 1937.

news and places them on a table in the Department of Interior press office. When a report by the Committee is being released and when such a report would have lasting interest, about a hundred cheap copies of the report, sans expensive paper and sans color illustrations, will be sent to Washington correspondents so that they can prepare their own stories. In addition, a mimeographed release covering the contents of the report will be prepared in the Committee's editorial office to be given to Washington correspondents who do not take the time to read the report itself and to be mailed to six or seven hundred individual newspapers.<sup>6</sup> The Post Office Department's publicity agents prepare releases of national interest and place them on a table which is visited by correspondents. The director or his associate will notify a reporter when news of particular interest to one of his papers—i.e., perhaps an appointment or a change of policy—has broken.<sup>7</sup> The Interstate Commerce Commission uses no other means of publicity than the press table, and even so it does not prepare releases summarizing the news but lets reporters dig it out for themselves. Two copies of all documents filed with the Commission, such as complaints, applications, and petitions, and two copies of all reports, orders, notices, and statements issued by the Commission and released for the public are marked "Do Not Remove" and placed on the table twice daily and left until closing.<sup>8</sup> The Bureau of Motor Carriers in the Commission follows the same general policy for distributing orders, circulars, notices, and reports, though it does maintain, in addition, mailing lists for the special requirements of individuals and organizations, by which a limited number of publications is distributed.<sup>9</sup> The Office of Information Research of the Securities and Exchange Commission maintains a press room with about ten desks with telephones, a telephone booth, typewriters, and paper. Several press representatives at their own expense have installed direct telephone lines to their Washington offices. The work of the

<sup>6</sup> Personal interview, January 18, 1937.

<sup>8</sup> Letter, March 27, 1937.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interview, February 2, 1937.

<sup>9</sup> Letter, March 30, 1937.

Commission is covered continuously by Associated Press, United Press, International News Service, Dow-Jones (*Wall Street Journal*), Central News Association, and by leading metropolitan newspapers of the nation. The Office of Information Research serves only to help the reporters get the data they need. It writes no releases on hearings, for these are covered by reporters, nor does it prepare special articles for newspapers and magazines. The information office spends its effort in distribution in the mailing of summaries of official action or summaries of information filed with the Commission to persons who have asked to be on the mailing list.<sup>10</sup> The Public Works Administration meets systematically the demand for local news by issuing an "allotment release" indexed to allow Washington reporters to find easily news of public works granted to localities in their territories. The allotment is described in terms of its benefits to the localities. The reporter in the press room can find news for his local papers without much effort of his own.<sup>11</sup>

The press conference is a method of distribution, allied to the press-table release, which serves well in the case of a prominent official of an agency already well publicized. Its value from the viewpoint of the publicity agent is dependent upon the poise and facility of the executive official who is being interviewed. The President's superior skill at verbal thrust and parry and informal witticism have often been remarked.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Harry

<sup>10</sup> Letter and statement, March 29, 1937.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley High, "You Can't Beat the Government," *Saturday Evening Post*, CCX, No. 21 (November 20, 1937), 36.

<sup>12</sup> Leo Rosten describes the presidential technique and also analyzes the effect on the reporters submitted to it, showing that sometimes an executive can be too affable ("President Roosevelt and the Washington Correspondents," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 1 [January, 1937], 36; see also A. S. Draper, "President Employs Air and Press To Educate Nation," *Literary Digest*, CXVII [January 27, 1934], 9; and J. Russell Young, "President Roosevelt and the Press," *Washington Evening Star*, January 20, 1937). Stenographic records of some past presidential press conferences were released in March, 1938. Excerpts showing the manner of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the type of dialogue in his press conferences will be found in Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The New Deal and the Press," *Liberty*, XV, No. 13 (March 26, 1938), 8-13; and in the *New*

Hopkins, formerly Works Progress Administrator, is also a dynamic person, able to make good news statements and to command the press conference by his own personality and poise. As a result, his press conference every Thursday afternoon had a large attendance, and he was able to use this method to give emphasis to certain releases.<sup>13</sup> In some other cases, the professional publicity agent is not so fortunate in his official and may, in fact, dread the prospect of turning him over to the pack of reporters. Whatever the case, the publicity agent will be present at the conference and may try to guide the lay official through the barrage of questions by suggestions given in preparation for the conference. Further precautions may be taken in a verbatim record of the questions and answers and in the preparation of any important announcement ahead of time for distribution at the conference in a manner similar to that for a release handed out in the press room.

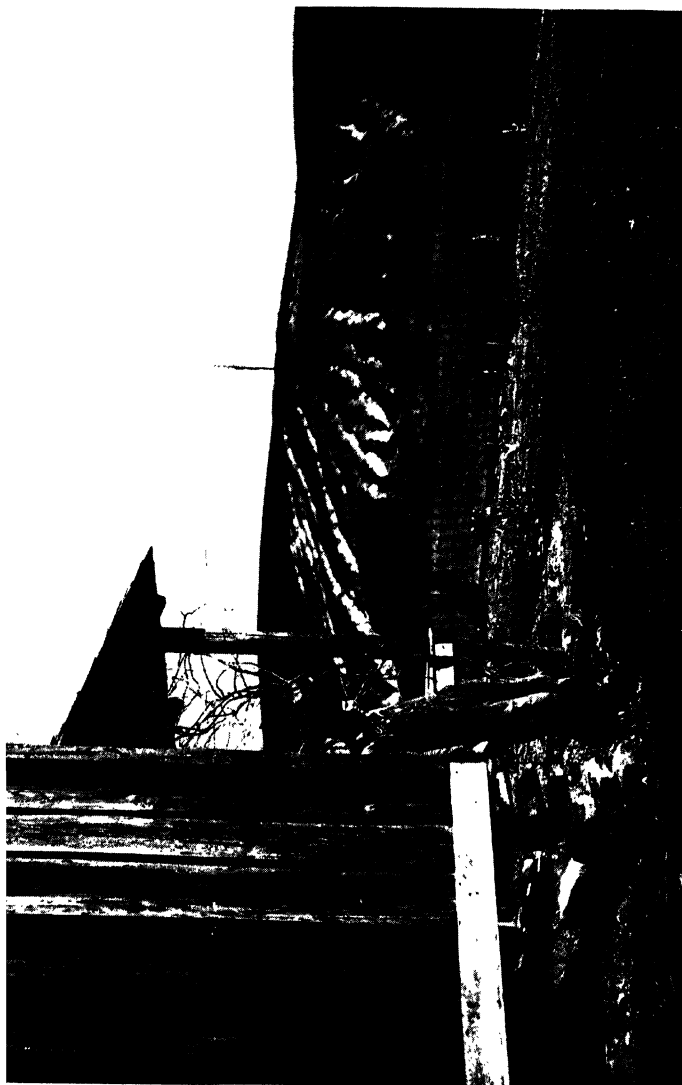
The press conference, varying as it does with executives, has, nevertheless, some universal characteristics. One advantage is its possible effect of creating an acquaintance between official and reporter so that the reporter feels honored by inclusion in a face-to-face relationship. If the official is a likable and poised person, the feeling of acquaintanceship may be developed into a friendly rapport that will make the publicity agent's job easier in time of attack upon his agency. Too much assumption of intimacy by the official may, on the other hand, create ill will, and a balance in the middle area is obviously the desirable use of the conference.

A disadvantage of the press conference is that it suffers from the disabilities of all large group colloquies in its attempt to reach any significant decision or understanding. "Untrained reporters, not having much of an idea of what anything is all

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*York Times*, March 14, 1938, p. 1; March 15, 1938, p. 12. More complete transcripts of significant presidential press conferences will be found in Samuel I. Rosenman (ed.), *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Random House, 1938), Vols. II, III, IV, and V.

• <sup>13</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937.



#### ERODED LAND ON A TENANT'S FARM, WALKER COUNTY, ALABAMA

More than a technical problem alone, soil erosion has its social consequence in destitution which calls for federal action, with publicity for the reasons behind the action. (Photo by Arthur Rothstein.)





about," says one newspaperman, "ask silly questions, annoying not only the officials but also the more mature members of the craft."<sup>14</sup> Even with a uniformly high level of information already shared by the reporters, a conference in which thirty or forty, or even a hundred, persons attempt to ask significant questions and get significant answers from one person would not be the ideal use of a group meeting. An address from the official, perhaps, or agreement among the questioners beforehand on one question to be discussed, might make the conference more fruitful, but the present use can hardly be called successful.<sup>15</sup>

The smaller possibility for certain control of the content of the news is another disadvantage of the press conference. A note of irritation from the official, the inflection of his voice, a sign of weariness at some question, the use by chance of some word or phrase that can be misinterpreted may give to the reporters' stories emphases, whether desired or not, that would not have resulted from a written release without the interview. Only the best of actors can use these devices to convey a meaning that he wants to register, and even the best of actors may see his emphasis misplaced.

The fact that much of the publicity from Washington is newsworthy gives the publicity agent another advantage in distribution when reporters frequently ask for particular information to use in special stories. The Works Progress Administration press office averages a telephone call every twelve minutes from reporters.<sup>16</sup> Social Security Board, Public Works Administration, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and all other agencies of large-scale activities have a comparable tempo of answering special requests. A reporter wants a special angle on some story for his paper; a local story somewhere out

<sup>14</sup> W. M. Kiplinger, "What Can You Believe?" *Today*, III, No. 5 (November 24, 1934), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Robert D. Leigh, *Group Leadership* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1936). This book discusses the psychology and techniques of group discussion.

<sup>16</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937.

in the nation has suggested a Washington angle for the correspondent of the local paper; the editor of some paper has decided to publish a series of stories on some New Deal activity and sends his Washington representative to get the facts. A steady barrage of requests for photographs of officials and projects reaches the office from newspapers.

Other media, as well as newspapers, request special aid and information. Of the 864 periodical articles relating to the work and subject matter of federal administrative agencies which were listed in eleven months of *Reader's Guide*, 604 might have been written by outside writers with the help of the information office, while only 260 were unquestionably written within the agency.<sup>17</sup> Most periodical publicity, in other words, is the result of requests by writers for information. Authors and book publishers also will ask for pictures, charts, and facts for publication. The newsreel editors will ask for interviews with an official prominently engaged in some activity or policy. Radio broadcasters, either on a chain or on a local broadcast, will request data for a news broadcast. When such requests come from privately owned media, the problems of distribution disappear. The publicity agent needs only to do the best he can to guide the reporter or to advise the official on what to say.

But lest it appear from the foregoing description of distributing sought-after publicity that life is all ease for the government publicity agent, it should be pointed out that he is also responsible for getting some planned publicity into the privately owned media. He must sometimes tell a story that is not considered newsworthy, at least not until he has been working some time to make it newsworthy. The chief weapons at hand for entering the media with this type of publicity are the experience and skill of the publicity agent in recognizing or in creating news and his personal connections with his fellows in the news trade.

<sup>17</sup> *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature (Unabridged)* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co.), Vol. XXXVI, Nos. 12 and 20; No. 12: June 9, 1936—January 4, 1937; No. 20: January 5, 1937—May 3, 1937.

A "sense for news" is a common possession of all publicity men worth their salt, just as it is a requisite of publicists who are paid by the media rather than by the source of news. The chief of a photographic office, in this case Soil Conservation Service, sits in his Washington office and receives numerous photographs from the field. Most of them will be record pictures, shots of terracing or strip-cropping, and as such would have no news appeal. When the good news picture turns up among record pictures, however, the publicity agent must be able to spot it. He then can turn it to the uses of publicity by illustrating some aspect of his agency's program, and he can, what is more, get it published because it is good news. The technique of distribution in such an instance changes from that of the agent satisfying a request to one of the agent suggesting the use of his release. Specifically, in this example, the publicity agent would telephone or visit a news-picture agency in Washington, perhaps the Associated Press, and would submit his pictures. The news service would choose the ones it wanted, and in most cases would attach its own credit line in publication, the government agent not insisting on a credit line when his primary desire is to get the picture published widely.<sup>18</sup>

Resettlement Administration in its emphasis on the graphic media followed much the same pattern as described above when distributing its unrequested pictures. It offered prints that it considered newsworthy to the major news-picture agencies, and sometimes the publicity agent visited rotogravure editors or news-service managers with a portfolio of pictures on share-croppers, drought refugees, migrant workers, or Resettlement communities. In addition, the Chief of Resettlement's photographic section adopted a unique experimental plan which may prove significant in the long-run development of the place of photography in governmental recording and reporting and its distribution. The basic assumption, shared by the Administrator and the Section Chief, was that a government agency should consider its function to be much broader than

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview, February 11, 1937.

the mere performance of duties commanded by the job assigned. It should, in fact, consider its role against the background of American life and culture as a whole and should recognize its place in the total scheme of social processes. In picture-taking this meant that Resettlement photographers should first record and report the performance of the agency's primary job, which was to administer rural relief, to move farm families from submarginal land, and to build rural and sub-urban communities. The second part of the photographers' job would be to record and report the milieu in which the agency performed its primary function. As a result, the photographers took pictures of nearly any subject that was significant as a document of American culture, and the files received series on life among both rural and urban people, on church buildings and the people who use them, on schools, street scenes, architecture, cemeteries, sports, and billboards. The connection between these and the projects of Resettlement Administration was slight in some cases, but picture agencies and publishers soon became acquainted with this background documentary material and began to call upon it for various uses. Once the photography office had established itself as a source of valuable and distinctive subjects, the distribution of prints more directly representing the work of the agency became easier. By the end of a year, the practice was justified by its advocates as a means of distributing publicity pictures alone, not to mention its continuous and increasing value as a documentation of the subjects covered.<sup>19</sup>

The ability to see news is just as essential in other types of distribution as in photography. The news writer must see the news possibilities in a statistical table that would never be accepted for publication as a table. He must be able to take the casual anecdote of a field executive and turn it into a story that will not only describe the work of the agency but will also be published widely for its value as news or entertainment. He must be able to see the possibilities for relating news of his

<sup>19</sup> Personal interview, December 28, 1937.

agency to some event that already commands attention; perhaps a flood or drought, perhaps a ceremony or a dispute may be the key to creating a news story that will get distributed because of its timeliness. The writer of a magazine article must show equal perception of what the audience will want to read or, stated another way, what the editors who serve that audience will want to publish.

A thorough knowledge of the entire field of communication is also a necessary part of the skill of a competent publicity agent. He must discern specialized media and remember them when a release to suit their special interests can be developed. Housing agencies may find architecture magazines useful; technical journals will serve some other agencies; the popular magazines of large circulation will be best for some releases. In eleven months, some sample periodical articles referring to federal administrative activities and subjects were distributed as follows: 237 in popular magazines; 151 in special-interest-group magazines, such as those for business, church, farm, and hobby groups; 126 to the "class" magazines, such as *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly*; and 199 to professional and scientific journals.<sup>20</sup> Either in writing the article or in giving information to an outside writer, the government information office had recognized the specialized audience of the periodicals. To some degree similar specialization can be found in distribution to newspapers.

The publicity agent's skill in discerning news and knowing where it will be wanted must frequently be supplemented by skill in leading the agents of privately owned media to discover it. Many events of valid news interest which would get no attention if announced in the usual type of release will be given extensive space if brought to the attention of the media in a more subtle way. The publicity agent may casually mention some incident to a reporter or magazine writer and arouse an interest which leads to the use of the agent's material. An object or event may be brought before the media as incidental

<sup>20</sup> *Reader's Guide*, Vol. XXXVI, Nos. 12 and 20.

to another event which may be arranged for the purpose. A good example would be, whether intentional or not, the introduction of the Food and Drug Administration's exhibit of dangerous drugs and cosmetics. This "chamber of horrors," as it was soon called, had been prepared to show the Senate Committee on Commerce the limitations of the existing food and drug law. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife, in her ubiquitous role of drawing attention to worthy causes, visited the Department of Agriculture building to see the exhibit. A reporter, George Durno of the McClure Syndicate, was present when she arrived and in his syndicated column reported her shocked reaction to the exhibit. The visit of the President's wife as the primary reason for the reporter's interest had served to publicize the object which the Administration's publicity agent had wanted to stress in the first place.<sup>21</sup> A visit by the President to any federal project always means a wide national distribution of news about the project itself, usually through both the newspapers and newsreels and frequently by radio as well.

A notable example of skill in creating a demand for a release by indirect means of approaching the medium was Resettlement Administration's distribution of "The Plow That Broke the Plains." The publicity office in this instance had a motion picture that was of sufficient artistic merit and audience-appeal to warrant the attempt to get national distribution for a twenty-eight-minute picture through the commercial theaters.<sup>22</sup> Instead of offering the film immediately to the commer-

<sup>21</sup> Ruth deForest Lamb, *American Chamber of Horrors, the Truth about Food and Drugs* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), pp. 296-98.

<sup>22</sup> The most successful previous distribution of government-made films of considerable length to commercial theaters occurred during the World War when the Committee on Public Information produced four features that were shown in about one-third of the nation's theaters. This was approximately the same distribution that the comedies of Charlie Chaplin were receiving at the same time. These films were rented to exhibitors, in contrast to the free distribution of "The Plow That Broke the Plains," and returned a gross revenue of some \$850,000 for government (Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1926], chap. ii, pp. 781-86; cf. George Creel, *How We Adver-*

cial distributors or exhibitors, the publicity office prepared a careful buildup through other media, particularly the newspapers and periodicals. Correspondents, radio announcers, motion-picture critics, and prominent officials were invited to a private showing in Washington. Similar previews were next held in New York and Chicago. The news wire services reported the production and described it as something new in government movies and, more important, a film worth seeing. The critics gave it attention in their columns in the three major cities and in magazines. While the film was being discussed in the press, the publicity office began its campaign among the independent exhibitors who were not inflexibly bound in contracts with the hostile major commercial producers. Exhibition in the independent houses meant additional local reviews in the press, more word-of-mouth promotion, more potential audience-interest and even demand to see the film. A mail campaign to a wider field of exhibitors described the production in a letter, folder, and some still photographs, and included a return postcard for the exhibitor to use in asking for the film. The problem of distribution settled down into one of printing the film, keeping it routed to theaters, and meeting the demands of both commercial and private applicants. No charge was made for "The Plow" beyond the transportation costs which the exhibitor paid.

The same procedure of arousing interest through comment was followed in preparing to distribute "The River," another relatively long (30-minute) short subject. Critics in New York saw a private showing; the Secretary of Agriculture invited Washington correspondents and officials to a private showing in Washington. Theaters in New Orleans, Memphis, and St. Louis, all river towns, gave the first public shows. This time

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*tised America* [New York: Harper & Bros., 1920], chap. ix). As their contribution to the cause of national recovery, the commercial film producers made and distributed several short film arguments for the National Recovery Administration in its promotional stage, and later Social Security Board received almost total circulation of its three-minute newsreel trailers; but these were not comparable to "The Plow That Broke the Plains" in length or style.



Paramount Pictures assumed the task of actual distribution to the commercial theaters, offering the film without charge to all exhibitors on its list and issuing the usual "press book" of suggestions for its promotion. Later, after the commercial theater showings, distribution to schools and small groups was to be handled by the Resettlement Administration.<sup>23</sup> Such a method of distribution as this used for "The Plow" and "The River" would be successful only if the release was worth the attention. These two films did command respect, and the approach to the commercial theater by way of the press and its stimulation of public interest could be attempted with success.

Probably more could be done than is normally done toward getting some other and less novel government films into the commercial theaters where the largest audience will see them. One attitude toward film distribution is expressed by the Division of Motion Pictures of the Department of Interior which assumes that it is obligated to lend its films to the public upon request but does not assume any responsibility for getting the maximum possible circulation by soliciting exhibitions.<sup>24</sup> The opposite view is held by Resettlement Administration, as shown above, and by Public Works Administration and Works Progress Administration, whose publicity chiefs believe that a film is somewhat wasted unless it is seen by a mass audience as found in the theaters. Public Works Administration at one time was attempting to follow Resettlement Administration's plan of a mail campaign to exhibitors.<sup>25</sup> Works Progress Administration has its state directors solicit showings for W.P.A. short subjects in the commercial theaters of their states. The Washington headquarters provides four field solicitors to aid the state directors. Since more than half the W.P.A. films depict projects within single states, a special argument can be made to the local exhibitor on the ground of audience-interest

<sup>23</sup> Personal interviews, January 2, 1937, and January 2, 1938.

<sup>24</sup> "Educational Motion Pictures," mimeographed list of Interior Department films and rules for their distribution, 1937; also personal interview, February 4, 1937.

<sup>25</sup> Personal interview, January 16, 1937.

in a movie about the home state.<sup>26</sup> All such efforts at film distribution point toward the possibility of more frequent appearances of government-made movies among the short subjects shown on commercial screens. It should be added, however, that government films will have to be made with this wide movie audience-interest in mind if they are to be successful in a wider distribution. Films made for the schoolroom, the discussion club, or the staff meeting will continue to be limited in circulation.<sup>27</sup>

While every publicity man must exercise the skills of recognizing news, devising situations in which the news will take on importance, or utilizing one event to draw attention to another, his personal connections cannot be minimized in considering his success as a distributor of releases. Perhaps in no other trade are personal relations so fruitful as in the newspaper trade and its associates, the radio, magazines, and newsreels. Reporters depend upon friends to give them tips on stories; they are able to dispense such courtesies as publicity for their friends or their friends' causes. The simplest news item can be reported either in a favorable light or, by some turn of a phrase or choice of a word, in a ridiculous or hostile manner. Politicians and executives have long since learned that the greatest success with the press lies in cultivating the reporters, and the publicity man in government service knows the same lesson.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Congress, House Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings on the First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937* (75th Cong. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937]), pp. 151-52; also personal interview, February 8, 1937.

<sup>27</sup> Much caustic comment can be roused from commercial film-makers and exhibitors concerning the typical educational film, under which they classify most government movies. Some Washington publicity men are equally disrespectful toward the films made by some of the federal agencies. The field of distribution for the orthodox, older type of "educational" short is sometimes called "playing the Sunday School circuit."

<sup>28</sup> The British propaganda office in 1914-17 found that it got its best results in the campaign for American support of Great Britain in the war by making personal friends of American reporters (H. C. Peterson, "British Influence on the American Press, 1914-17," *American Political Science Review*, XXXI, No. 1 [February, 1937], 82-83).

The difference between the executive and the publicity man is that usually the publicity man has come from newspaper work and knows the reporters so well he does not have to cultivate them.

The advantages of personal connections with the representatives of media are obvious. The publicity man at a social luncheon with a magazine editor may tell some interesting anecdote of a recent development in his agency, and the editor will perhaps have a writer assigned to prepare an article. Or a newsreel assignment editor may be called by phone, addressed by his first name, told that he could get some interesting shots at a project, and asked if he wants the publicity office to arrange for picture-taking. The editor of a rotogravure page or picture magazine may be visited in his office and shown photographs of land-use or works projects in a friendliness that makes him more sympathetic to their use. It is the same advantage that primary, first-name relationships have in any activity in which persons deal with other persons, whether it be selling, exchanging patients, criticizing, manufacturing, doing creative work, farming, or publicity.

#### DISTRIBUTION TO THE RADIO

While no evidence of deliberate administrative censorship of the radio by the federal government has been convincing, it is true, nevertheless, that the radio cannot maintain the same defiantly independent position enjoyed by the press, periodicals, and commercial motion pictures. A broadcasting station must prove it has operated in the public interest, convenience, and necessity before it can get its license renewed; the air cannot be defended as private property in the way a printing press or theater can be. A steady criticism of the commercial broadcaster's motives in the use of this public property for his private gain and a demand for public ownership of part of the wave-lengths have developed, as typified in the following excerpt from an address by J. W. Studebaker, United States

Commissioner of Education, before the Eighth Institute on Education by Radio, May 4, 1937, at Columbus, Ohio:

It is my opinion that, when broadcasting plays a "much more important part in the educational program" than at present, that result will have been brought about not only by increased cooperation between educators and broadcasters, but also through a large number of *public agencies operating stations on the public channels, exclusively in the public interest, performing public services over and above those which these agencies can perform by the use of the commercial radio stations alone.* The Executive Departments of the Federal Government have not been satisfied to leave to commercial agencies the responsibility of carrying the Government's point-to-point radio communications. Roughly, 25 per cent of all the radio frequencies now in use are assigned to the various departments of the Federal Government. And I am reliably informed that the Federal Departments expect to use a considerably larger percentage of the ultra-high frequencies between 30,000 and 300,000 kilocycles.<sup>29</sup>

Against a combination of insecurities, in having to renew licenses and in being attacked steadily, the commercial broadcaster's interest lies in conciliation and conforming, so far as the profit motive allows, to the desires of the public and semipublic groups in the community. He sets aside, always proclaiming his act, a certain amount of time for educational and civic broadcasts, along with other noncommercial programs of considerable variety. The federal offices are ready with programs that not only satisfy the broadcaster's need to render commendable social service but that also appeal to listening groups through the inclusion of valuable factual data, good advice on important problems, interesting news of public affairs, or satisfactory entertainment. They may expect to receive favorable attention to any request for time and may expect to be asked frequently by the broadcaster to supply programs. The chief limitation on their possible use of the air is the fact that only about eighteen hours a day are usable for all programs, both commercial and noncommercial, and within the portion of this

<sup>29</sup> File 135599, U.S. Office of Education, Department of the Interior, Washington. The part italicized was written in capital letters in the mimeographed copy of the speech.

time that may be used for nonearning broadcasts, the federal offices must share time with organizations, churches, and state and local governments.

Methods of distribution to the radio vary with the type of program sought or offered; the network broadcast would call for different techniques from the local. Several agencies send script to regional or state and even county staff members to localize the content for local broadcast. Some send short news or explanatory announcements directly to local broadcast stations and ask that they be read at odd intervals as fill-in. Resettlement Administration had success with a mail campaign asking local stations to use 15-minute electrical transcriptions of dramatized reasons for a land-use and resettlement program. In addition to the mail campaign, the director of the radio section visited a number of stations and asked them to use the programs. A total of 460 stations, ranging from the strongest to the weakest, had agreed at one time to use the records. Each was expected to return the record-disk after use, but not all complied. Resettlement Administration franked the records to the stations and paid the return postage as well.<sup>30</sup>

In general, the distribution of government programs to local stations is a competition among various agencies to get their messages on the air, in any form ranging from a half-minute announcement to an electrical transcription of a well-staged drama. The bureaus of the Department of Agriculture, to avoid such competition, practice a co-operative allocation of the time available for farm programs, through the supervision of the Radio Service in the Department.

Distribution of programs to the national networks, after the time is arranged either by request of the broadcaster or by request of the government agency, is the simple one of having the speakers or performers at the microphone. All technical operations are conducted by the company. The wide range of broadcasting connections allows the origin of a program to be almost anywhere within the reach of telephone lines. The Farm

<sup>30</sup> Personal interview, December 28, 1937.

and Home Hour may come from Washington or from a state fair. It may have several points of origin within the same hour. Army programs have been broadcast from airplanes flying over Washington; Coast Guard operations have been described from a cutter at sea. For programs originating in Washington, at least one new federal building, the new Interior building, has broadcasting studios under the same roof as other administrative activities.<sup>31</sup>

The Office of Education, Federal Radio Project, which produces network educational broadcasts that have, as well, incidental publicity value, has gone beyond the mere delivery of a program to the microphone and has added circulation-building to its work of distribution. For "The World Is Yours," a program on exhibits in the Smithsonian Institution, a listener-aid in the form of a printed summary of the program content was offered in each broadcast. When a mailing list had been secured from requests for the listener-aid, each person on the list was asked to send in the names of five friends who would be interested. A direct-mail publicity campaign was thus used to build circulation for a radio program, and with great success.

On September 12, 1936, thirteen weeks after the initial broadcast, 13,717 names were on the mailing list as a result of the broadcast announcement alone. The list was then "killed," on September 12, 1936, and listeners were told to re-request the aid. The new list had grown to 14,803 by October 16, 1936, a month later. It continued to grow to 37,212 on January 25, 1937, when listeners on it were asked to send in the names of their five interested friends. The growth from that time forward reached 94,319 on February 15, 1937; 102,821 on March 1, 1937; and 133,399 on June 1, 1937.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, press release, September 5, 1937, File P.N. 3974, Department of Interior. *Variety*, November 16, 1938, p. 30, reports that the addresses by officials at the formal opening of the Interior studios emphasized the use of radio to encourage travel in the United States. The same issue also reports an effort to find talent for government broadcasts. Twenty per cent of the applicants at the first audition were federal employees who hoped to become radio performers.

The Federal Radio Project also uses newspaper publicity to build a listening audience for its broadcasts, while a script service to supply school classes and amateur radio clubs with broadcast material is a circulation-builder for the network programs as well as a way of achieving the Project's educational aim.<sup>32</sup>

Such success with the use of mail and newspaper publicity to stimulate listening to a radio program suggests the possibility of further usage with publicity programs that seek a definite response. A series of broadcasts on forest-fire prevention, on the need for flood prevention, on the wisdom and pleasure in remodeling or building homes, on the reasons for social security insurance, if such programs were produced over a period of weeks, could offer listener-aids, build mailing lists, and relate newspaper releases to broadcasts in the same manner as the Radio Project used these devices with its broadcasts on exhibits in the Smithsonian Institution.

#### CONTROLLED DISTRIBUTION

When the government publicity office is not reliant upon the favors of independent media but may prepare its releases with assurance that they will be delivered as desired, the process of distribution becomes chiefly one of building and maintaining mailing lists, answering requests for releases, and recognizing opportunities for the use of releases when no request has been received.

Taken in order, keeping the mailing list is probably the most prominent task of the three. The list may grow from a nucleus of clients or publications as requests are received or it may have to be compiled originally. If the mailing list has to be compiled the publicity agent must locate persons and groups who would normally be interested in the releases and then direct publicity to them in the hope that it will spread to secondary audiences. This, obviously, is a more difficult demand

<sup>32</sup> Personal interviews, December 30, 1937; also unpublished intraoffice report on circulation and results of a questionnaire, examined in the office of the Project, Office of Education, December 30, 1937.

on the agent than is the mere waiting for a list to grow from requests. It has, therefore, had more attention. The success of such media as pamphlets and house organs depends largely upon having a good mailing list.

A first step in building the list in almost all cases would be the logical one of listing the names of persons whose vocations or social connections indicate an established interest in the work of the agency. An agency dealing directly with farmers would start with the names of farmers in local communities and would decentralize the collection and maintenance of the list in order to deal at close range with a vocational group that is nation wide. The Director of Information for Farm Credit Administration says:

If a secretary does not have a list of good prospects, one of the simplest and probably the most successful way to start one is to request each member of your board of directors to supply you with a list of ten or twenty names of people whom he thinks would be the kind of borrowers to whom the association could make loans safely. The list can be expanded by the post card method in which each person already on the list will supply the names of a few additional good risks. Before adding these names to the list supplied by the directors, however, it might be well to check them with the county agent, officers of farm organizations or others who are in a good position to know something of the credit standing of the individuals. One of the best lists available to production credit associations is the list of borrowers from the land banks. . . . Lists of farmers living in irrigation or drainage districts frequently are easily obtained. Very often secretary-treasurers of national farm loan associations have found it profitable to search the mortgage records in county recorders' offices and thus obtain names of farmers who might be in the market for land bank loans to refinance their existing indebtedness.<sup>33</sup>

Some agencies cannot afford economically to build a list of large proportions, so they elect to distribute their releases to key persons in the community. Thus pamphlets designed by Works Progress Administration for "the public" as a whole are apportioned to state administrators on a basis of the states' populations. Each state administrator is expected to have in his office a mailing list of club leaders, teachers, ministers, pro-

<sup>33</sup> "Remarks by E. B. Reid," *op cit.*



fessional people, presidents and secretaries of organizations, and other persons likely to be leaders of opinion; and it is the responsibility of the state administrator to distribute the pamphlets to this list.<sup>34</sup> Social Security Board combines distribution of releases such as publications and press releases from the Washington headquarters, when of national scope, with distribution to mailing lists compiled in the regional offices, when of regional appeal. The regional office lists include such categories as periodicals, public officials, and organizations and individuals within the region whose interest might be expected. The regional publicity agent is directed to recommend additions to the Washington list and to co-ordinate the use of his regional list with the use of the national list in order to avoid duplicate distribution.<sup>35</sup>

Most Washington mailing lists run to a type, with minor variations for specific activities of various agencies. They generally include selected newspapers and magazines related to the subject, correspondents for columns and specialized media, teachers of the subject, officers of interest or discussion groups, business and professional people, libraries, school heads, ministers, clients of the agency, and others as they are needed and can be obtained.

The mailing list can be subdivided for the distribution of any release that may have only a limited significance. It can be kept up to date by a periodic circularization of the names with a return card to indicate a desire to remain on the list or else to be dropped. This notice may also ask the recipient to indicate the subjects in which he is most interested and thus enable the publicity office to subdivide its lists accurately. Once the list is established, varying degrees of control can be placed on dis-

<sup>34</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937.

<sup>35</sup> "Preliminary Outline of Responsibilities of Regional Informational Service Representatives" (mimeographed; Informational Service, Social Security Board, Washington, D.C.).

tribution both in the quantity of circulation and in the direction of special-interest releases.<sup>36</sup>

In some cases the mailing list may be used primarily not for the direct distribution of publications but for announcing releases which may be secured by request. The Tariff Commission, Farm Credit Administration, and National Resources Committee are among the agencies which follow this practice for some publications.

The general public may also be reached in a limited degree through leaflets given away at exhibits (often called "throw-aways") or by posters displayed on projects. Both are under the control of the distributor. A more extensive approach, however, and one that has untold significance for the future development of federal administrative public relations, is the blanket coverage of all citizens directly and immediately by postmasters and mail carriers. The post offices have long been used to display posters of fugitives from federal justice, posters for recruiting to the armed services, announcements of civil service examinations, as well as advertisements for air mail and parcel post. They have also served from time to time in recent years to display posters for the Treasury's Baby Bonds, Resettlement Administration's rural rehabilitation program, Federal Housing Administration's home spending program, and Social Security Board's general announcement. Such posters are displayed by the local postmaster in his informal role as the most conspicuous representative of the federal government and the incumbent party in his community. He is usually willing to accede to the requests of other administrative agencies for lobby displays.

In addition to the use of post office lobbies for display, the post office personnel has been used in recent years to deliver forms in the President's re-employment drive, to

<sup>36</sup> These observations are based upon a running examination of numerous mailed-out releases over a period of a year, including periodic requests to indicate a continued interest in the releases.

distribute veterans' bonus bonds, to enrol employees under the Social Security Act, and to deliver registration blanks in the Census of Unemployment. While each of these major national distributions was primarily an operative function, the incidental publicity value and the possible future use of postmen to deliver information rather than forms are apparent. Its effectiveness would depend upon the caution with which it was used. If overdone, such direct distribution would come to have no more meaning than the annoying direct-mail advertisements of too-ready commercial firms. Within the bounds of careful planning and strict co-ordination and control, the post office and its personnel might, on the other hand, become the focal point of local contact between the citizen and the federal agencies.<sup>37</sup>

Another means of reaching the interested public under controlled distribution is through government field workers. This is, however, more a part of public relations in the large than a part of the work of the publicity offices and hence is not emphasized here. Suffice it to say that such agencies as the Department of Agriculture have one of their most valuable channels of distribution in their field forces, particularly, in the case of Agriculture, with the extension agents.<sup>38</sup>

Much of government's controlled distribution comes from requests for information, just as much publicity through uncontrolled media is the result of requests. There is no serious problem of distribution involved in answering such requests beyond an occasional need to stimulate interest through such media as speeches or radio broadcasts ending with instructions to write for further information. Once the request is received, a pamphlet or a series of publications may be sent to answer

<sup>37</sup> This use of the post office is suggested by James W. Fesler, "Executive Management and the Federal Field Service," in the President's Committee on Administrative Management, *Report of the Committee with Studies of Administrative Management in the Federal Government* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), pp. 293-94.

<sup>38</sup> E. S. Wengert, "The Public Relations of Selected Federal Administrative Agencies" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1936, unpublished).

the routine questions which are usually asked. The questions that do not run to type can be answered by a special letter or can be routed to the expert most competent to reply. A uniform attitude of willingness to answer questions from citizens prevails among the Washington publicity men, and in most agencies the machinery for distributing requested information operates with routine.

As in the case of uncontrolled distribution, however, the skill of the publicity man should not be minimized in controlled distribution merely because much of the process involves answering requests from individuals or groups. The necessity of recognizing opportunities for distribution of the various types of controlled material remains for many agencies, no matter how extensive the circulation through requests might be. An agency which is either in a stage of promoting its program or in a stage of defending itself against attack cannot afford to rely solely upon requests for its publicity. The publicity agent must be able to recognize possibilities to get the maximum distribution. He must see in a meeting of some group concerned with his subject matter the chance for a speech or for the distribution of a pamphlet; he must see how a strip-film or motion picture would be acceptable to a group. If the schools in a state or regional agent's territory offer courses related to his subject, he must see the value to teachers of some of his publicity and must be ready to supply whatever is wanted. A convention of public officials or of some other vocational group must be recognized as an opportunity to arrange an exhibit and perhaps a speech, while state and county fairs will call for the display of exhibits with perhaps motion pictures and certainly with throwaway leaflets. Always the alert publicity agent watches the news of the day in his territory, whether it be local or national, to see how events announced or opinions expressed will make an opening for the use of some of his material in controlled as well as in uncontrolled distribution.

A final possibility under controlled distribution, though its

use is not typical, is that of co-operating with private publicity offices in the preparation and distribution of releases that serve both the public and private interest. Outstanding examples of such co-operative distribution have been provided by the National Park Service and the Bureau of Mines, both in the Department of the Interior. The Park Service finds useful allies in distributing park publicity among the railroad and automobile publicity offices. Posters, envelope stickers, and motion pictures have been distributed by these representatives of industries which profit from travel.<sup>39</sup> The Bureau of Mines has made practically all its motion pictures in co-operation with industries and trade associations which want to see the messages delivered. "Sulphur," for example, was made in co-operation with the Texas Gulf Sulphur Company; "The Story of Heavy Excavating Machinery," with the Bucyrus Company; "The Story of Gasoline," with Standard Oil Company of Indiana; "The Story of a Storage Battery," with the Willard Storage Battery Company; "The Story of Power," with Stone and Webster Engineering Corporation; "The Story of Copper Mining," with the Copper and Brass Research Association; "The Story of Steel-Manufacture of Pipe," with United States Steel Corporation; and so on through fifty-five titles.<sup>40</sup> The Federal Housing Administration is reported to have co-operated with newspapers by providing releases which helped the newspapers sell advertising to building supply dealers, financial institutions, and real estate developers. More than ten thousand mats furnished on the request of the newspapers are said to have produced 8,433,301 additional lines of advertising.<sup>41</sup> Such helpful co-operation in production and distribution would

<sup>39</sup> Personal interview, February, 1937.

<sup>40</sup> "Procedure for Obtaining the Loan of Motion Pictures Distributed by Various Government Departments and Agencies" (mimeographed; U.S. Information Service, Washington).

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate Committee To Investigate the Executive Agencies of the Government, *Report on the Government Activities on Library, Information, and Statistical Services* (prepared by the Brookings Institution, Senate Committee Print [Washington: Government Printing Office]), p. 13.

be possible only when the government agency's publicity for its own objective is also good publicity for the private interest, hence the method is restricted almost entirely to those agencies which serve private interests as their service to the public.

#### THE AMOUNT OF PUBLICITY

In chapter iii the kind of government publicity was analyzed in relation to the media in which it appeared. It is more difficult to estimate the amount of publicity which issues in any one year from the federal publicity offices in Washington.

To hear the enemies of the New Deal or of "bureaucracy" talk, one would gather that government publicity is a flood that covers all the space of newspapers and all the time of radio.<sup>42</sup> Some federal publicity agents, on the other hand, will insist that they do not issue publicity at all but only exist to help the newspapermen get what they demand. This is especially true of the agents for the older offices. An official of the Division of Current Information in the Department of State said:

I have always claimed that the Department of State did not maintain a "publicity office." . . . The purpose of creating [the Division of Current Information] was to facilitate newspaper correspondents who sought information at the Department of State and to save the time of the experts to some extent, for usually the experts were most busy just when the correspondents wanted information.<sup>43</sup>

Such variant conceptions of the nature of administrative publicity are, more significantly, a handicap in any attempt to measure the amount of publicity. When no common definition of the commodity exists among the people who produce it and when outside critics have shown small interest in calm accuracy of definition, little can be done toward exact treatment of the

<sup>42</sup> Reference was made in chap. i to some of the animosity toward government publicity. An additional reference, in which the critic implies that the New Deal is a propaganda machine as great as the Nazi's thought-control and refers to President Franklin D. Roosevelt as "Der Führer," is Gordon Carroll's, "Dr. Roosevelt's Propaganda Trust," *American Mercury*, Vol. XLII, No. 165 (September, 1937).

<sup>43</sup> Letter, October 18, 1937.

subject. Furthermore, the difficulty of measuring the amount of publicity, even assuming a possible agreement on definition of the term, would be made almost insurmountable by the very nature of much publicity. The most effective publicity might come, as it often does, from talking informally with a magazine writer or newsreel editor without a scrap of record to indicate a release. The personal authority of the publicity agent in commanding loyalty from reporters would not be represented in the mere number of press releases available for counting.

Nevertheless, though mailed-out press releases are relatively unimportant, they are interesting as the most easily ascertainable measure of distribution. The Brookings Institution, conducting a study for the Byrd (Senate) Committee on executive agencies, found that in the three months ended September 30, 1936, 4,794 public releases had been issued in a total of 7,139,457 copies. The mailing lists in use October 1, 1936, totaled 3,004 with a total of 2,280,983 names, including duplicates. The figures do not include those for Works Progress Administration, which did not answer the Brookings questionnaire. Only mailing lists maintained in Washington, with the exception of one for the Tennessee Valley Authority, were considered. Lists for the distribution of publications from the Government Printing Office were omitted.<sup>44</sup>

Without the authority of any official status and dependent solely upon the generosity of the publicity officials, the questionnaire in the present study asked for estimates of the amount of releases in eight different media. Most of the informants replied in so far as they possessed records or could venture an estimate, and, while the totals do not represent a perfect picture of the amount of government publicity from Washington, the replies are summarized in Table 4 as a rough indication.

When one passes beyond the number of releases distributed and tries to estimate the circulation—i.e., the size of audience

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate Committee To Investigate the Executive Agencies of the Government, *op. cit.*

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reached—the evidence becomes even more inaccessible because of the lack of records and the difficulty of compiling the data necessary for records. Even in the case of news releases

TABLE 4

ESTIMATED ANNUAL AMOUNT OF PUBLICITY DISTRIBUTED BY CERTAIN  
WASHINGTON FEDERAL PUBLICITY OFFICES—TAKEN FROM REPLIES  
BY OFFICIALS TO QUESTIONNAIRE AND NOT ALL-INCLUSIVE

Agency	News Re- leases	Radio Pro- grams	Movie Show- ings	Film- Strip Show- ings	Ex- hibits Opened	Fea- ture Articles Re- leased	Post- ers Dis- played New	Photo- graphs Re- leased
Agricultural Adjustment Adminis- tration . . . . .		208*			12			150
Department of Agriculture								
Department Office . . . . .	1,500	3,000				50		1,000
Bureau of Public Roads . . . . .	20	2	2,000	100	10	1		3,500
Soil Conservation Service . . . . .	650							
Forest Service . . . . .	104*	104*				24*		†
Department of Commerce . . . . .	5,200*	52*						
Bureau of Standards . . . . .	624*					52*	6	312*
Emergency Conservation Work . . . . .	300*	5			15			300
Farm Credit Administration . . . . .	317	60			4	15	3	‡
Federal Deposit Insurance Corpora- tion . . . . .	40	1				6	1	
Federal Home Loan Board . . . . .	204*							
Federal Housing Administration . . . . .	†	12*		4	50	520*		
Federal Power Commission . . . . .	150				5			
Federal Trade Commission . . . . .	900							
Department of Interior								
Department Office . . . . .	240*	24*				24*		1,200*
Bureau of Reclamation . . . . .	208*	20	1,040*		52*			260*
National Park Service . . . . .	260*							
National Labor Relations Board . . . . .	1,040*							
National Youth Administration . . . . .	40					6		100
Navy Department . . . . .	520*							1,300*
Public Works Administration . . . . .	2,100	20	§		†			‡
P. W. A. Housing Division . . . . .	520*				104*			1,040*
Reconstruction Finance Corporation . . . . .	130							
Rural Electrification Administration . . . . .	100	52			25	100		500
Securities Exchange Commission . . . . .	1,500*							
Smithsonian Institution . . . . .	104*	52						
Social Security Board . . . . .	251	1,565			666	955	15	1,000
State Department . . . . .	624*							
U. S. Civil Service Commission . . . . .	48*							
U. S. Maritime Commission . . . . .	780*							
Works Progress Administration . . . . .		52*			24*			

\* Computed for annual distribution from statements of weekly or monthly distribution.

† Hundreds.

‡ Very few.

§ Thousands.

mailed to a standing list and yielding a figure for distribution, no entirely accurate way exists for knowing how widely the release was printed and what was the total circulation of the newspapers which printed it. Some indication of the magnitude of the efforts of one or two agencies can be gained, how-



ever, from miscellaneous records that are not uniform for all agencies. Such records do not reveal the variety of circulation of the releases from the various offices nor do they illustrate the typical circulation.

Social Security Board is somewhat unique in having kept thorough records of its distribution and circulation in so far as it could ascertain the latter. It may serve as an example of the federal agency whose publicity must reach a wide sector of the public in a critical period of defense against political attack and of preparing for the administration of a new act of enormous consequences. The Informational Service of the Board divided its count into the first eleven months of 1936 and the twelfth month. The first period included the presidential campaign, in which the Social Security Act was under vigorous attack from the Republican party, the period of registration of employers, and part of the period of registration of employees. The second period, the month of December, 1936, covered the time of completing employee registration and reporting progress in setting up the accounts.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the figures on distribution and circulation in the table, Informational Service estimated that its three short motion-picture releases up to December 31, 1936, had been seen by an aggregate audience of 117,000,000 persons, not allowing for duplicate attendance. On that date, "We, the People, and Social Security," which was released to theaters on October 22, 1936, had shown in 11,346 theaters in 6,500 towns and cities, to an audience of 58,000,000. "Youthful Old Age," released to theaters November 16, 1936, had shown in 7,191 theaters in 4,700 towns and cities to 33,000,000 persons. "Applications for Old-Age Benefits," released to theaters November 16, 1936, had shown in 5,889 theaters in 3,997 towns and cities to 26,000,000 persons. All figures were estimates, the attendance figures being based on reports from the theaters. All three of these films were short newsreel-type trailers de-

<sup>45</sup> Interoffice report by Informational Service, Social Security Board, Washington (supplied by Informational Service from its files).

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## PARTIAL SUMMARY OF DISTRIBUTION AND CIRCULATION OF SOCIAL SECURITY BOARD'S RELEASES IN 1936—TAKEN FROM FILES OF THE INFORMATIONAL SERVICE

	January 1— December 1, 1936	Month of December, 1936	Total, 1936*
<i>To public through newspapers and magazines:</i>			
Telephone inquiries handled . . . . .	13,380	2,410	15,790
Personal inquiries (by reporters, etc.) . . .	1,644	1,110	2,754
Special articles prepared . . . . .	170	17	187
Special reports prepared for individual newspapers and articles checked for re- porters . . . . .	750	18	768
Press releases issued . . . . .	212	39	251
Copies of press releases mailed . . . . .	482,900	264,750	747,650
Press conferences arranged . . . . .	6	3	9
Photos taken by news photo services . . . .	1,000	1 series	.....
Foreign-language newspapers supplied with translations into 20 languages . . . .	1,000	1,000	.....
<i>To interest groups:</i>			
Business-trade associations sent releases . .	2,010	2,110	.....
Business papers sent releases . . . . .	.....	1,700	.....
Business firms sent releases . . . . .	.....	1,222	.....
Labor unions supplied with printed ma- terial (1,600,000 pieces) . . . . .	31,835	980	.....
Central labor bodies and workers' educa- tional groups supplied with printed matter and posters . . . . .	800	180	.....
Labor papers receiving special releases . .	350	654	.....
Labor leaflets prepared . . . . .	6	2	8
Circulars prepared for labor groups . . . .	2	3	5
Speeches prepared for labor . . . . .	6	1	7
Educational, religious, social-work groups; libraries, clubs sent form letters . . . . .	90,993	153	.....
Pieces of printed material sent to these groups . . . . .	180,000	66,065	246,065
<i>To public at large via publications and posters:</i>			
Copies of leaflet distributed in connection with assignment of account numbers . .	58,000,000	.....	58,000,000
Other publications distributed . . . . .	4,635,321	1,254,853	5,890,174
Publications prepared for printing office .	16	13	29
Speeches mimeographed . . . . .	24	6	30
Copies of speeches distributed . . . . .	98,600	3,000	101,600
Copies of poster on assignment of ac- count numbers . . . . .	3,300,000	.....	3,300,000

\* Covers only the items which are cumulative.

[Table continued on following page.]

## GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY

PARTIAL SUMMARY OF DISTRIBUTION AND CIRCULATION OF  
SOCIAL SECURITY BOARD'S RELEASES IN 1936—TAKEN FROM  
FILES OF THE INFORMATIONAL SERVICE—*Continued*

	January 1- December 1, 1936	Month of December, 1936	Total, 1936*
<i>To public at large via exhibits:</i>			
Exhibits produced.....	20		20
National convention displays.....	10	2	12
Social-work conference displays.....	15	2	17
State-fair displays.....	2		2
County-fair displays.....	3		3
University displays.....	5		5
Factory display.....	1		1
Department-store display.....	1		1
State-legislature display.....		1	1
Educational-group display.....		1	1
Sets of series of charts distributed.....	500	100	600
Spot maps prepared for display.....	12		12
Posters designed for motion-picture unit.....	10	5	15
<i>To public at large via radio:</i>			
Network broadcasts.....	12†	23	35
Individual stations supplied with speakers.....	114†	114	
Dialogues distributed to field offices for broadcasting.....	3†	141	144
Spot announcements sent to 600-700 radio stations for repeated broadcasting in assignment of account numbers.....	35†	20	55
Stations receiving electrical transcriptions on old age benefits.....	200†	223	
<i>To public at large via speeches:</i>			
Speeches made by staff of Informational Service.....	186	52	238
Speaking engagements arranged.....	818	375	1,193
Speeches prepared for others.....	80	7	87

† Covers only the period October 1, 1936, to December 1, 1936.

signed to explain the Social Security Act simply and briefly. They were timely, in view of the impending assignment of social security numbers and the beginning of operation under the Act. This timeliness also drew the attention of the commercial newsreel companies, and seven newsreel shots were made of Board operations and Board officials speaking. The Board's own trailers and the commercial newsreels together were estimated to have entered over 85 per cent of all theaters in the nation.

The informational task of the Social Security Board was the largest in government during this period and one of the largest ever recorded in peacetime. Agencies with smaller requirements would have smaller printing orders on publications, smaller circulation of motion pictures, and fewer contacts with organized groups. Works Progress Administration could reach its worker-clientele with 2,500,000 copies of *Our Job with WPA*, its most widely distributed pamphlet; while a special-interest group such as the aviation industry demanded only 5,000 copies of a circular on the W.P.A. airport program.<sup>46</sup> "The Plow That Broke the Plains," which, with "The River," has probably received more notice and more circulation than any government film of comparable length, did not approach the circulation claimed by the Social Security Board for its three-minute trailers. "The Plow" had shown to an estimated 7,500,000 persons after ten months of distribution, in contrast to the 20,000,000 and upward figures for Social Security trailers.<sup>47</sup> The 7,500,000 for "The Plow" is no small circulation, of course, and, in fact, in comparison with the circulation in "the public at large" of the typical government film, it represents an innovation. "The Plow," it should be recalled, is a 28-minute film, while the Social Security films are 3-minute trailers.

The amount of news of federal administration in comparison to all other news appearing in the major media can be estimated roughly for the newspaper and magazine. By estimate, the total number of items comparable to federal releases (excluding society, sports, local stories, and daily statements, e.g., ship sailings or weather reports), appearing in the *New York Times* and originating outside New York City during the seven weeks analyzed in chapter iii, was 8,540.<sup>48</sup> The number of items which appeared to have been released or influenced by

<sup>46</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, press release, April 11, 1937, File 1412-37.

<sup>48</sup> The period covered was six weeks, from February 3 through April 18, 1937, and one week, from July 21 through July 27, 1937. The estimate was made by counting all nonlocal items comparable to federal news for one week and multiplying by seven.

federal administrative publicity offices was 1,281, including those from the President's office. Thus 15 per cent of all "wire" items, or those originating outside of New York City and dealing with subjects other than society, sports, or daily routine record, referred to federal administrative matters. In the one year of periodicals examined in chapter iii, approximately 20,000 articles were published by the 108 magazines indexed by *Reader's Guide*.<sup>49</sup> The 864 articles which dealt with the work of federal administrative agencies or with the subjects handled by those agencies made only 4.3 per cent of the total.

As for the movies, any devotee of the commercial theater can testify that government-made films play almost no part in the total feature output of the screen. The newsreels are a different story. Edgar Dale in an exploratory study found that in 1935 "war-army-navy" pictures ranked second among twenty-eight content categories in the frequency of their appearance in Fox and Universal newsreels. A category called "Government and Civic Officials (Royalty)" ranked third in Fox and eleventh in Universal reels, while "Government-Political-Civic (Activities)" ranked fifth for Fox and seventh for Universal newsreels.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, Mr. Dale's categories were not identified for federal as distinct from state, local, or foreign government officials, activities, wars, armies, or navies. Presumably the United States federal administrative agencies receive their share of the screen and therefore contribute an important part of the total content of the newsreels. The armed services, in addition, enjoy the rather frequent appearance of commercial photoplays based upon fictional life in the services.

Available categories of the content of radio programs are similarly not comparable with federal administrative programs,

<sup>49</sup> The estimate was made by counting the titles per page for several pages, multiplying by the total number of pages, and dividing by three to care for duplicate citations, three being the average number of entries per article in *Reader's Guide* (H. W. Wilson Co., letter, November 16, 1938).

<sup>50</sup> Dale, "Need for Study of the Newsreels," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 3 (July, 1937), 122.

so that no estimate can be made of the relative weight of federal programs in the total of radio time. Analyses of radio program content tend to divide nonmusical programs into "educational," in connection with teaching; "political," which may mean party speeches as well as talks by administrators; "talks on national policies," which might be by federal officials or by their assailants. All of these categories, and others not mentioned here, might cover federal programs, but there is no way of knowing.<sup>51</sup> Within the whole field of nonentertainment programs, one interesting observation can be made. The time given by national networks to the federal administrative agencies during the four months, January, February, June, and July, 1937, for miscellaneous programs was almost exactly equaled by the time given to members of Congress, in terms of the number of programs arranged. In terms of the time given each program, the congressmen had a slight advantage. Administrative agencies gave seventy-one 15-minute, twelve 30-minute, and five 1-hour programs, or a total of  $28\frac{3}{4}$  hours. Members of Congress gave fifty-four 15-minute and thirty-six 30-minute programs, or a total of  $31\frac{1}{2}$  hours.

The great variety of practices, problems, and scope of distribution and extent of circulation is apparent at once in a review of this chapter. Some agencies can rely upon small circulation; some have an enormous field, as was illustrated by the report on Social Security Board's circulation and distribution. The difficulties of distribution vary with the availability of controlled in contrast to uncontrolled (or privately owned) media, and the agency which can rely upon small circulation through controlled media consequently has small worries compared with the agency which must reach a vast public via privately owned media. If a wide distribution is demanded by the nature of the agency's work and program, the personal skill

<sup>51</sup> Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport, *The Psychology of Radio* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1935), pp. 73-84 and 250. The authors quote several studies of content by other investigators as well as their own study.

of the publicity staff in recognizing or creating news value for releases and in making the proper approaches to the privately owned media is perhaps paramount as a factor in achieving the end desired. Finally, the consideration of the amount of publicity distributed by the Washington offices reveals the lack of adequate records and suggests other handicaps to exact estimates. These difficulties and others hamper any attempt to measure the effectiveness of publicity efforts, as will be shown in chapter v.

## CHAPTER V

### MEASUREMENT IN GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY

THE function of measurement in any publicity, whether public or private in administration, is threefold in nature. First, attitudes in the prospective audience should be ascertained before the publicity program can be planned. Second, the success of the program should be determined by measuring the results in modified, or reoriented, attitudes. Third, and closely allied to the second purpose, the economy of the program's administration in terms of funds and energy can be determined only from some measurement of the results in relation to costs of particular aspects of the program. The lack of exact knowledge of audience attitudes was questioned in chapter ii on planning the publicity program. The measurement practices that exist to determine the effectiveness of publicity and the slight information available on the cost of federal publicity will be considered in this chapter.

Conceivably, a practicing publicity agent might turn to the scientific psychologist for data on attitudes already examined and for instruments of measurement, but there a bewildering maze of indeterminate, exploratory testing would prove little for the administrator.<sup>1</sup> Too few of the studies in psychology have been conducted in the public at large to reveal much concerning citizen attitudes. The accessibility of high-school and college students to inquiring social scientists has meant that much of the data on attitudes is confined to those groups. Too many of the studies deal with such small samples that the results cannot be accepted as typical of a cross-section of the population. Often the validity of the technique used is too

<sup>1</sup> Theodore M. Newcomb reports on many researches in attitudes, covering the most significant studies of the past decade, in "Social Attitudes and Their Measurement," chap. xiii, of Gardner Murphy, Lois Barclay Murphy, and Theodore M. Newcomb, *Experimental Social Psychology* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Bros., 1937).



questionable to inspire confidence in the results. A further disadvantage is that the examiners' preoccupation with such vast generalities as "Communism," "Fascism," "Race," "God," or "Morality," has produced equally general conclusions, and the governmental administrator would search in vain for help on attitudes specifically relevant to the relation of citizen to public administration. Behind all the psychological studies lies the fundamental deficiency, as Theodore M. Newcomb points out, that most experiments on changing attitudes—the field of most significance to the publicity man—are unreal in that they isolate one condition for study when in reality attitudes are "deep-laid in the fundamental needs of life as molded by group patterns."<sup>2</sup>

While the individual cases of measurement are not useful to the publicity man, the sum of discovery during the still brief period of measuring attitudes is a verification, nevertheless, of certain broad assumptions developed through experience in publicity. It is shown, for example, that an emotional appeal is better than a rational;<sup>3</sup> that personal address is a more commanding medium than the printed page or the radio;<sup>4</sup> that the prestige of the exhorter is very important;<sup>5</sup> that the person whose initial attitude is more or less neutral shows the greatest change after bombardment by propaganda;<sup>6</sup> that the federal government, at least in terms of prestige of employment, enjoys greater prestige than state and local governments;<sup>7</sup> that the

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 971-72.

<sup>3</sup> George W. Hartmann, "A Field Experiment on the Comparative Effectiveness of 'Emotional' and 'Rational' Political Leaflets in Determining Election Returns," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XXXI, No. 1 (April-June, 1936), 99-114.

<sup>4</sup> F. H. Knowler, "A Study of the Effect of Oral Argument on Changes of Attitude," *Journal of Social Psychology*, VI (1935), 315-47; "A Study of the Effect of Printed Argument on Changes in Attitude," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XXX (1936), 522-32; also W. H. Wilke, "An Experimental Comparison of the Speech, the Radio, and the Printed Page as Propaganda Devices," *Archives of Psychology*, No. 169 (1934).

<sup>5</sup> Murphy, Murphy, and Newcomb, *op. cit.*, pp. 967-71. <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 965-66.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard D. White, *Further Contributions to the Prestige Value of Public Employment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932).

best effects, in summary, will be obtained if the propaganda method involves vivid, novel, realistic, and emotionally charged experiences, if the propaganda has a clear field devoid of counterinfluences or the opportunity to hear the complexities of and the objections to the point of view being advocated, and if the method uses individuals, institutions, groups, or their symbols, which have an established prestige value in the audience.<sup>8</sup> The administrative publicist in his catch-as-catch-can race with the clock each day observes these verified findings by applying them whenever possible. But he has neither time nor money, nor can he get from the psychologists the usable instruments, to make exact studies for his own purposes. His measurement practices are far from being precise in the scientific sense. They may not even be devices of measurement at all, but they are the existing methods in federal administration.

#### MEASUREMENT PRACTICES

The most common effort to discover the pertinence of the publicity program and its reception by the audience involves the steady reading of letters from citizens, the reading of press clippings and press digests, and the vicarious use of such near-scientific devices as questionnaires and straw polls.

Works Progress Administration, as an illustration, receives some 4,000 letters a week and discovers in them the aspects of its work which are most misunderstood. Its publicity program can be adjusted accordingly.<sup>9</sup> The President in his role of personal symbol for the whole of federal government receives about 4,000 letters a day, many of which are examined to indicate public response to aspects of the total national administration's program.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Murphy, Murphy, and Newcomb, *op. cit.*, p. 979. All the studies of attitudes cited in connection with measurement are summarized in chap. xiii of this volume.

<sup>9</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937.

<sup>10</sup> James Kieran, "The President Listens In on the Nation," *New York Times Magazine*, October 3, 1937, p. 2.

Radio fan mail also reveals something to the office which prepares radio releases. Nine of the twenty-seven agencies which use the radio and which answered the questionnaire keep a record of fan mail. In some instances radio mail response is stimulated in the radio broadcast content. The President says, "Write me at the White House," and many listeners pour out their troubles and appeals to him. The agricultural bureaus and the Office of Education Federal Radio Project (though primarily engaged in teaching by radio), the Department of Commerce, and other agencies mention bulletins or printed copies of programs or "more information" and suggest that listeners write for them. Fan mail at best is a dubious index of the actual audience reached and the general opinion toward the program, but at the present stage of measurement, it is an important aid in evaluating commercial broadcasting. Government publicity offices as well can analyze it with benefit, which would be increased greatly by combining the analysis of mail content and quantity with other indices, such as estimated number of receiving sets in an area, number of inquiries about services after a broadcast, and data from commercial surveys to see if the mail is reliable for measuring audience reaction.<sup>11</sup>

Clipping newspapers was put on a mass-production basis in Washington by the New Deal administration. It is reported that President Franklin Roosevelt and his publicity-conscious secretary, the late Louis Howe, discovered the need for an extensive record of newspaper comment while still in the governor's office in Albany. They established the Press Intelligence Service in Washington soon after they arrived in the Presidency.<sup>12</sup> The office was put under the National Emergency Council. It samples about 400 daily and weekly newspapers out of the approximate total of 2,000 dailies and 11,000 weeklies in the nation, including foreign-language and trade

<sup>11</sup> Frederick H. Lumley, *Measurement in Radio* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1934), chap. iii; this is a thorough discussion of commercial practices and their value in dealing with fan mail.

<sup>12</sup> Personal interview, January 18, 1937.

papers,<sup>13</sup> and performs the twofold function of reporting press comment and keeping an enormous file of clippings for the use of executive officials who might want to refer to a particular item or possibly to conduct research on opinion.

The report on news is distributed on a strictly interoffice basis through the mimeographed daily *Press Intelligence Bulletin*. Items in the *Bulletin* are grouped under agencies, with cross-index from the subject matter. Each item reports the heading of the news story; the subhead, if any, the city, and the name of the newspaper; the political affiliation of the paper under "Democrat," "Republican," "Independent Democrat," "Independent Republican," or plain "Independent"; the date of the story; and whether it is a special dispatch rather than a general story from a wire service. Editorials are summarized usually in one sentence and grouped under the various subject categories as "Favorable" or "Unfavorable" to the agency and its program or to the administration in general. The *Bulletin* reports news items within about a week of their appearance, the time lag varying with the time required for the papers to reach Washington by mail. It also lists news stories and editorials on subjects of interest to federal agencies but not referring by name to any agency. Farm news, foreign affairs, labor conflicts and other similar subjects would be covered in this category.<sup>14</sup>

To get a more complete, more particularized, and more im-

<sup>13</sup> *World Almanac*, 1937 (New York: World Telegram, 1937).

<sup>14</sup> From examination of a file of the *Bulletin* in the Library of Congress, January, 1937. The *Bulletin* is one of the few government publications not available to the public. The explanation given by the Service is its cost and the lack of facilities for taking subscriptions since it is mimeographed and not printed by the Government Printing Office. A more plausible reason is that it was designed to serve top executives in a more or less confidential manner, giving both good and bad comments about the New Deal administration, and hence would not be "good" publicity when the press turned hostile. The Service has also provoked hostile references to wasting public money on a "Roosevelt propaganda machine," so that little would be gained from advertising it (for an example of hostility see Gordon Carroll, "Dr. Roosevelt's Propaganda Trust," *American Mercury*, XLII, 165 [September, 1937], 21-22).

mediate summary of news than offered by the Press Intelligence Service, several Washington agencies have set up clipping and digest services of their own. Among these are Works Progress Administration and Social Security Board. The W.P.A. digest is a mimeographed summary of news of the day delivered to the Administrator and other executives in Washington on the day covered. This means a rapid job of reading and condensing the spot news. Much of it, in fact, is taken from the press ticker in the agency's own offices without waiting for the newspapers to appear. News items referring to the agency, developments in Congress, national news such as strikes, and occasional outstanding stories of other federal agencies are condensed. Needless to say, the chief attention is given to news stories and editorials concerning the Works Progress Administration and work relief program. A section of the *Digest* lists by heading and source clippings that have been filed for officials' use. The listing includes items of state W.P.A. news as well as national.

The Social Security Board's *Daily Press Digest* also is issued on the day news items appear in the East and is distributed to officials in "editions" as new material is added. Papers from the Midwest and the West are read as soon as possible after arrival. Each item is numbered to correspond with the file number of the clipping so that officials may borrow the clipping if necessary. The summaries of news stories, editorials, and magazine articles are grouped under headings corresponding to the general work of the Board and the particular subjects of its divisions of old age benefits, public assistance, and unemployment compensation. The type of media—e.g., daily press, magazine press, business press—is specified in headings for the general news. A novel aid in these digests is the designation of misstatements by single asterisks inclosing the error. Adverse criticism is set apart by double asterisks; as it also is distinguished in some manner in other digests. The Social Security Information Office, because it isolates misstatements as they are discovered, can go further than other agencies in

analyzing its clippings for trends and for the effectiveness of its informational program. An example of such analysis was the tabulated report in January, 1937, on 6,288 newspaper and magazine clippings, showing the decline of press hostility to the social security program after the victory of President Roosevelt in the election of 1936. The President's opposition, abetted by a large proportion of the press, had attacked the program during the campaign. The percentage of errors in clippings during October, 1936, immediately prior to the election, was 2.98; the percentage of criticisms, 28.58. In November (most of the month followed the election), the percentage of errors dropped slightly to 2.71, while the hostile criticism declined to 11.22. In December, the percentage of errors dropped still farther to 1.12, and the criticisms dropped to 6.55 per cent. In January, 1937, errors dropped to an insignificant .79 per cent of the total clippings, and criticisms to 4.88 per cent.<sup>15</sup> Here is meaningful verification of the impressions gathered from newspaper reading.

Most of the thirty agencies (out of forty-four answering the questionnaire) which keep records of clippings do not maintain such elaborate press digests as these of W.P.A. and Social Security Board.<sup>16</sup> Instead, they gather as they appear clippings referring to their programs, and officials read the items rather than summaries. Resettlement Administration, for example, routes a daily book of clippings to the Administrator and to key men in the Information Division.<sup>17</sup>

Whether the record of press notices is gathered from the central Press Intelligence Service, from agency press digest services, or rarely, from these combined with a press ticker in the office, the precise analysis of newspaper and periodical

<sup>15</sup> From a chart supplied by Informational Service of the Social Security Board.

<sup>16</sup> The reader will note that Social Security Board is never abbreviated in these pages. This is acquiescing in a publicity policy furthered with some care by the Board to avoid the inevitable jokes that would be made about the initials S.S.B. and their similarity to the call-letters of a common American epithet.

<sup>17</sup> Personal interview, January 3, 1937.

content is rare in Washington. The Social Security Board's counting of errors is an approach to the measurement of effectiveness, but it is more the exception than the rule. In the typical practice, officials arrive at conclusions from press content by intuition in casual analysis. Their conclusions in any case are concerned more with what sort of news is reaching the public than with the effectiveness of their publicity in changing attitudes or with the existing attitudes in the audience.

The questionnaire, while not as exact as some other techniques of scientific attitude measurement, is fairly easy to use and is especially suitable for use by federal agencies because the mailing privilege eliminates postal costs. The most elaborate recent attempt to get opinion was made by the Federal Radio Project of the Office of Education in connection with its radio program, "The World Is Yours," written around exhibits in the Smithsonian Institution. This broadcast is primarily a teaching program and the publicity given the Smithsonian Institution and the Office of Education is only incidental, but the use of the questionnaire could be adapted to programs of a more strictly publicity type. The mailing list was built through offering a listener-aid, in this case a printed summary of the programs, and a request to persons already on the list for names of five friends who would be interested. The questionnaire went to 133,399 persons on June 1, 1937, and 35,892 had replied by September 1, 1937, when the tabulation was started. Relief labor was used to analyze the returns, so that the eight weeks required for tabulation may not be typical of the time that would be required with skilled clerks.

This particular questionnaire unfortunately could not be taken as a model by a publicity office desiring to measure effectiveness. It was designed partly to elicit mail response and to publicize the program, as the inclosed letter indicated by saying the program might be discontinued unless listeners liked it. The mailing list was by definition made up of persons who had shown exceptional interest through having bothered to write for the listener-aid or to suggest their friends as re-

ipients. Nothing but an amiable response could have been expected. The questionnaire itself did not reveal the social and economic status of the informant nor the level of education. In spite of these weaknesses, however, the returns were useful in showing which subjects in the series listeners preferred, in proving that 65 per cent of the listeners were satisfied with the time of the broadcast, and in revealing such information about the audience as the fact that 56 per cent is male, an average of 3.34 persons compose the typical listening group, the age distribution is even between 9 and 60, the vocational distribution of listening adults is fairly even and surprisingly not overweighted by students and teachers, and the location of the audience is properly distributed according to population density and signal strength of broadcasting stations. The overwhelming vote for continuing the program and listener-aid could have been anticipated from the nature of the mailing list and accompanying letter. This trial of the questionnaire, nevertheless, even with its imperfections, suggests further use of the method by other agencies.<sup>18</sup>

The government agent is uniquely fortunate in that a considerable portion of the questions asked by the commercial straw polls are relevant to the publicity work of the federal administration. The two most outstanding polls at the moment are the *Fortune Quarterly Survey* and the poll by the *American Institute of Public Opinion*.<sup>19</sup> These two are continuous in their investigations, and their reports on opinion are usually up to the minute on issues of current importance. Both use a sampling technique designed to get a cross-section of the public at large, but the resulting predictive accuracy will not be infallible until the constant efforts to improve the sampling succeed. The great test of the straw polls, the national election

<sup>18</sup> Data on results of the questionnaire are taken from a typewritten intra-office report examined in the office of the Federal Radio Project, Office of Education, Department of Interior, December 30, 1937.

<sup>19</sup> Claude E. Robinson, "Recent Developments in the Straw Poll Field," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 3 (July, 1937), 45-56; No. 4 (October, 1937), 42-52.



of 1936, proved the superiority of a careful sampling over indiscriminate distribution of ballots but showed also that in its present stage the technique of measurement is far from precise. The success of the *Fortune Quarterly Survey* in predicting the Roosevelt popular vote in 1936 within 1 per cent of the actual returns was a matter of good luck, one critic says, because the sample was numerically too small, and the American Institute results would have been improved by a more proper weighting of the sample.<sup>20</sup>

The straw poll is, nevertheless, more accurate than mere guessing, and until unquestionably scientific techniques become feasible for use by the practitioner of publicity, government may be thankful that the commercial polls frequently report opinion concerning its programs and problems. Within the last two years, the two main polling firms have asked some thirty questions pertinent to the work of eighteen federal administrative agencies. In addition, a number of questions concerning proposed bills in Congress and the standing of the President as a candidate have been asked.<sup>21</sup>

The administrative publicity official wants to know what the public thinks of his agency so he can plan his program to remove misconceptions. He wants to know, too, whether the objectives set for his agency are approved by the public at large, for if they are approved the subsequent election will vindicate the administration no matter how much hostile noise is made by the minority opposition. Works Progress Administration, by accepting the *Fortune Quarterly Survey* of October, 1936, was assured that work relief instead of a cash dole was preferable to 74.5 per cent of the persons questioned; that W.P.A. work was considered useful by 54.2 per cent; that the W.P.A. was considered adequate to care for the unemployed

<sup>20</sup> Harold F. Gosnell, "How Accurate Were the Polls?" *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 1 (January, 1937), 97-105.

<sup>21</sup> From an examination of the *Fortune Quarterly Survey* from its beginning in July, 1935, through October, 1937, and a summary of results in the polls of the American Institute of Public Opinion through November, 1937, supplied by the Institute's office, 110 E. Forty-second St., New York City.

by 55.7 per cent; that it was considered efficient in administration by 38.1 per cent, extravagant by 31.3 per cent, and inefficient by only 2 per cent; and that a large group of 28.6 per cent had not formed an opinion concerning W.P.A.'s efficiency, thus indicating a potential audience to convince. This report in October, 1936, came at the very time the work relief program was under fire by Republican campaigners.<sup>22</sup>

Social Security Board could proceed with great assurance after both major polls had shown the public overwhelmingly in favor of old age pensions administered by government. The American Institute poll of January, 1936, reported 89 per cent in favor of "government old-age pensions for needy persons." The *Fortune Quarterly Survey* in April, 1937, a few months after the operation of the Social Security Act had begun, reported that 75 per cent of registrants under the law and 72.4 per cent of nonregistrants approved the "United States old-age pension law." Disapproval was voted by 22.6 per cent of registrants and 19 per cent of nonregistrants. Only 2.4 per cent of registrants and 8.6 per cent of nonregistrants did not have an opinion, indicating that information concerning the Act had spread widely.

Public Health Service had been advocating the free discussion of venereal diseases in the hope of breaking down social taboos and educating for prevention and cure. In December, 1936, and in May and August, 1937, in three separate polls after the Public Health Service campaign had taken effect, the American Institute of Public Opinion discovered and verified the surprising fact that Americans were nine to one in favor of governmental action toward controlling venereal diseases. Ninety per cent favored a government bureau to distribute information concerning venereal diseases; 88 per cent said this bureau should set up clinics for treatment; 79 per cent thought

<sup>22</sup> Personal interview, February, 1937; also "Dollars and Sense," a radio campaign speech by Harry Hopkins, Works Progress Administrator, October 9, 1936, over Columbia Broadcasting System network (published as a leaflet by the Progressive National Committee Supporting Franklin D. Roosevelt for President).

Congress should appropriate \$25,000,000 to help control the evil; 92 per cent favored state laws requiring medical tests for all persons seeking marriage licenses; and 87 per cent wanted to be examined for syphilis by their own physicians in strict confidence and without cost.

These are significant examples of the uses of straw polls to government administration. Together with the other items which were examined and counted in the preparation of this discussion, they make an impressive total of the information available concerning general opinion of administrative programs, practices, and problems. An additional minor aid from commercial polls comes from the inclusion of government radio programs in radio-listener surveys. Since, however, only one or two of the standing programs ever are rated in these surveys, their significance to government publicity as a whole is not important at present.

A good many government publicity men think the only valid index possible for measuring the success of a program in achieving its objectives is the use of the agency's services. By definition this index is limited to those agencies which are providing usable services subject to quantitative measurement. The argument has its merits. As an analogy, sales are a good test of the success of advertising, though even in commerce much of the benefit from advertising is reflected in good-will not immediately translated into sales, and sales therefore are not the only index of success. In government, demands for service from service agencies would reflect the power of publicity, but subject always to the same reservation that citizen good-will would not be shown. The rising curve of electric power used on farms indicates that Rural Electrification Administration's publicity campaign has been effective.<sup>23</sup> The increase in visi-

<sup>23</sup> One business publicist attributes to federal publicity a new public awareness of the advantages of electric power and suggests that it can be a benefit to the utilities (Ralph B. Cooney, "What Politics Has Handed the Electric Utilities—a Power Conscious Public," *Public Utilities Fortnightly*, XIX, No. 2 [January 21, 1937], 77-82).

tors to national parks from 2,774,561 in 1930 to 4,284,615 in 1935 and to 7,012,803 in 1937 can be ascribed in part to better roads and more automobiles and also in part to the work of the publicity office of National Park Service.<sup>24</sup> An increase in the number of farmers borrowing money for the purchase of farms indicates, publicity men assume, that Farm Credit Administration has delivered information of its services effectively to the people who need and want the loans.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, other factors than publicity also influence the demand for services and would have to be considered in any exact measurement of results, but, nevertheless, demand is one factor to watch.

Among all these methods of measurement used by federal publicity offices, none is a precise, thorough, and unquestionably accurate index of the attitudes in the audience or of the success of publicity in reorienting these attitudes. The conclusion must be drawn again that practicing publicity men in Washington work essentially from intuition based upon experience. They "know" without systematic research "what the public will read and can understand"; they "know" from casual impressionistic observation whether their agency's program enjoys prestige with its public. They remember from their experience as reporters what the newspapers will print, and, by typical newspaper reasoning, what the newspapers will print becomes also what the public will read, regardless of occasional grievous errors of editorial judgment, such as assuming that the public was hostile to the New Deal in the national election of 1936.

Publicity men in general may be close kin to intuitive artists who have acquired more than usual skill in observation that lacks the discipline of a scientific method but has still a higher-than-average accuracy because of the observer's maturity. One

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, press release, October 18, 1937, File no. P.N. 6897.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Farm Credit Administration, press release, No. 9-12 (December 3, 1937).

writer-critic has thus defended his colleagues in this scientific world:

If governments, which use so many experts, were wiser, they would use experts to study and interpret the national literature which shows the national imagination working upon the national predicament. Writers need not be prophetic but they may be seismographic, recording tremors of opinion while they are still sensations to most people, finding the earliest clear words for roiled emotions. What writers begin to say, what they give up saying, what they emphasize, what they disregard, what they announce, what they assume: these are mental and moral news. They are guide-posts to history if not straw votes in the next election.<sup>26</sup>

This ability to be seismographic, one might add, is a requisite for a successful politician or administrative leader, as well as for writers, and within public administration publicity is closest of all activities to the essential administrative leadership. The publicity man is the right-hand assistant of the administrator who must be a leader, a manipulator of others (a politician in the broad sense), at the same time that he is an executive handling technical aspects of the administrative process.

One weakness in relying solely upon the impressionistic method of measurement is that it ignores the inevitable demand for precision and efficiency imposed on social administration by a system of power technology. The cultural situation of the 1930's simply is not sympathetic to practices not based on tangible evidence. Businessmen ask their advertising agencies for proof that advertising copy will sell more goods or build good-will; they ask publishers to prove by a count of heads just how many readers buy their products. An almost passionate devotion to achieving the maximum return for the minimum of cost in money and effort pervades the whole of modern activity. It may be called "smart business" or "scientific management" or "rationalization" or what you will; it adds up to the same thing: an inflexible demand for efficiency and a rigorous intolerance of ignorance. The godlike regularity of the engine has set the pattern for the social world of its domination. Pub-

<sup>26</sup> Carl Van Doren, *Three Worlds* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1936), p. 266.

lic administration cannot escape any more than can private administration, nor should it.

None would claim, of course, that the scientific method has been achieved widely in either private or public administration at the present time. Indeed, a slight contact with some of the "psychologists" of salesmanship and other medicine men who use the current talk about science to dupe anxious businessmen causes one to suspect that pseudo science is much heavier than science in private administration outside of the technical services. Some so-called scientific data in advertising research look suspiciously as if the purveyors were engaged in a modern version of an old shell game.<sup>27</sup> But in spite of the faking in part of the field, much serious, honest effort to develop accurate measurement is being made. The work of the scientific psychologists was touched upon in the opening of this chapter. Techniques more applicable to actual practice and, though not precise now, subject to constant improvement are already available in government offices, as the foregoing description of practices has shown. Since intuition alone is not an adequate measurement in terms of the modern emphasis on valid evidence for decisions, government publicity offices should uniformly make the effort to use at least as many measurement techniques as are feasible. The available techniques which are put to use will depend upon factors in the agency's audience situation. Most important is not the technique itself but the recognition on the part of these government publicity officials of the need for measurement and of the possible uses of available techniques.

Signs of the recognition of both the need and the way to measurement have occasionally appeared. Not a measurement of publicity but closely related to it was a study in the late 1920's by the Department of Agriculture of the effective-

<sup>27</sup> Lumley, for instance, shows how the results of radio-listener surveys can be distorted in interpretation, sometimes carrying over into the distortion the implication that the interpretation was made by the same reputable impartial agency which only gathered the data (*op. cit.*, pp. 26, 38-42, 239, n. 14).

ness and cost of various methods of extension teaching.<sup>28</sup> This might be a model for a similar examination of strictly publicity methods. More recently, in early January, 1938, the office of Education Federal Radio Project had formed a committee on research, in recognition of the need for measurement.<sup>29</sup> Its first task was to plan a questionnaire for radio audiences which would be more defensible than the unsatisfactory questionnaire used on the previous study of the audience for "The World Is Yours." Again, the Radio Project's broadcasts are primarily for teaching (the new survey will attempt to find results in learning), but the practices and problems of a teaching agency are so similar to those of a publicity office that what one does the other should watch.

#### COST OF PUBLICITY PROGRAMS UNKNOWN

Because federal administrative publicity is the object of recurring hostility from journalists and congressmen, no accurate estimate of the total cost can be made. As a result of this hostility, administrative publicity is surrounded with legal restraints so that evasive titles are sometimes given publicity officials and questionable titles are given categories of expenditures for publicity which is legally sanctioned under other names. "The Plow That Broke the Plains," first of the two Resettlement Administration films that reached a wide audience of theater-goers, was justified to the Comptroller-General as having for its purpose the education of employees in Washington and in the field and the informing of technicians, scientists, and scholars of the land problem. These people would in turn interest themselves in Resettlement Administration and give information and advice. Actually, it was an ex-

<sup>28</sup> M. C. Wilson, *Extension Methods and Their Relative Effectiveness* (U.S. Department of Agriculture Technical Bull. 106 [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929]); H. J. Baker and M. C. Wilson, *Relative Costs of Extension Methods Which Influence Changes in Farm and Home Practices* (U.S. Department of Agriculture Technical Bull. 125 [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929]).

<sup>29</sup> Personal interview, December 30, 1937.

cellent publicity film, enhanced by music, directed toward the mass public. The official record, however, would show expenditure for a teaching-film, used for in-service training or in technical conferences.<sup>30</sup> Similar obscurity would be true of most of the official record of publicity expenditures. Appropriations for "Printing and Binding," a typical budget category, may include both the printing of forms and regulations and the printing of publicity releases.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, this designation may be limited to the printing of forms, stationery, and nonpublicity reports.<sup>32</sup> The budget does not contain any lump sum designated for advertising, nor is there any available composite statement of the amount spent by federal agencies on paid advertising. A statement for any particular agency might include the cost of such publicity advertising as that conducted by the Savings Bond section of the Bureau of the Public Debt, amounting in 1936 to approximately \$720,000 for paid space, pamphlets for a mail campaign, and posters, and also the cost, irrelevant to publicity, of advertising for bids on building sites, building, repairs, and materials bought through the Procurement Office.<sup>33</sup> Part of the equivalent of postal revenue given in mailing privilege to the federal executive agencies could be

<sup>30</sup> Comptroller-General, Ruling, A-64607, August 19, 1935.

<sup>31</sup> E. g., see U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Hearing before Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations in Charge of Deficiency Appropriations, *First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937* (75th Cong., 1st sess. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937]), pp. 114-15, for the testimony of Works Progress Administrator Harry Hopkins concerning printing and binding costs of W.P.A.

<sup>32</sup> The Department of Justice, for example, uses its appropriation for printing briefs and transcripts of records in cases, legal forms for courts and the Department, stationery, decisions, and miscellaneous (U.S. Congress, Hearing before the Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations, *Department of Justice Appropriation Bill for 1936* [74th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935)], pp. 54-56). Likewise the Treasury spends all its appropriation in the Government Printing Office and none for personnel (U.S. Congress, Hearing before the Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations, *Hearing on Treasury Department Appropriation Bill for 1936*).

<sup>33</sup> Letter, July 16, 1937.



assigned to mailing publicity, but the segregation would be a long and difficult task.

The best indication of some few miscellaneous costs is provided by the Brookings survey of informational services for the Senate Committee To Investigate the Executive Agencies of Government.<sup>34</sup> Supporting its request for information with the authority of a Senate committee, the Brookings investigation disclosed that expenditures for the salaries of 146 persons engaged full time solely in publicity work in the fiscal year of 1936 amounted to \$521,740, and for the 124 partly so engaged, \$81,094. It found also, as an indication of some costs, that Federal Housing Administration spent \$94,855 in fiscal 1936 on its service of supplying mats and other copy to private building interests for their newspaper advertising to stimulate building. Motion-picture production by the Department of Agriculture for the fiscal year cost \$100,539; by the Department of the Interior, for the Civilian Conservation Corps, \$68,474; by Resettlement Administration on "The Plow That Broke the Plains," \$40,113; by Federal Housing Administration for seven 1-reel films, \$83,762; and by Social Security Board for "We, the People, and Social Security," \$14,735. Film distribution costs were also given for Federal Housing Administration, \$68,887, and for Social Security Board, \$9,763 not including costs of return express charges nor the salaries of Social Security regional offices engaged in distribution. In the use of the radio, the Department of Agriculture spent \$28,740 during fiscal 1936 for the preparation and distribution of programs.<sup>35</sup> Other costs for

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Congress, Report to the Select Committee To Investigate the Executive Agencies of the Government, No. 13, *Report of the Government Activities on Library, Information, and Statistical Services* (prepared by the Brookings Institution [75th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937)], Senate Committee Print), pp. 12-16.

<sup>35</sup> In explaining a budget request for \$30,765 for radio service in fiscal 1936, the Director of Information of the Department of Agriculture said this amount would provide programs for 350 stations which would donate about 35,000 hours of time. This time if sold commercially, he estimated, would be worth about \$2,000,000 (U.S. Congress, Hearing before Subcommittee of the House

preparing radio programs, including electrical transcriptions, were \$40,470 for Federal Housing Administration and \$28,615 for Resettlement Administration. The Brookings report gives a detailed account of salaries paid by each agency and the funds from which they are paid, but beyond this total cost for personnel, no effort is made to estimate the total cost of equipment, production, and distribution of publicity for all the executive agencies. Consequently, no possibility exists for comparing the cost of publicity with the total administrative cost or with related activities such as education or intragovernmental reporting.

When the costs of publicity cannot be isolated, and when precise measurement of effectiveness is lacking, little can be done toward ascertaining the economy of federal practices in costs of money and energy. Obvious recommendations, in addition to the one for measurement, are (1) that federal agencies be freed from the archaic restrictions that force them into disguising some publicity costs, and (2) that a uniform system of designating publicity costs be adopted. The first reform is essential to any effort to discover the costs of publicity in relation to total costs and comparable functions. Until publicity costs are segregated, no authoritative, comprehensive statement can be made either in defense of or in attack upon the publicity practices of federal offices. The second reform, a uniform designation of publicity categories, would make possible a comparison in cost of different publicity offices and would allow the installation of a system of unit costs which would permit comparison of the effectiveness of one publicity technique with another. Until such a reform is made, there is no way of knowing whether the amount spent by one agency gets as good results as an equal amount spent by another or whether the results from one publicity technique or medium are as good in relation to cost as the results from another.

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Committee on Appropriations, *Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1936* [74th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935)], p. 78).

Some changes could be made in administrative practice, without waiting for an act of Congress to bless administrative publicity. Agencies could accept the obligation to measure their effectiveness. They could accept the obligation to report in uniform categories the unit costs of releases, as, in fact, the Department of Agriculture has done in ascertaining that a bulletin sent in reply to an inquiry costs  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cents in contrast to a cost of 30 cents for a letter reply.<sup>36</sup> A great deal more would be told about economy by saying that the cost of "The Plow That Broke the Plains" was less than 1 cent per person seeing it, or that "We, the People, and Social Security" cost less than .002 cents per person than by giving the total cost of distribution without relation to circulation. A report that the cost of a certain release or campaign was a specific sum in relation to such specific results in audience response would have more meaning than the present almost complete silence about results. The two related studies, previously cited, in the Department of Agriculture of the effectiveness and cost of extension methods in changing farm and home practices might well be studied and perhaps emulated by other branches of federal public relations.

Perhaps statements of cost in relation to effect should not be made public so long as government publicity is considered heinous. There is no moral demand for an administrative official to open himself unduly to attack with evidence taken from his own reports, but there is small excuse for administrative officials to keep secrets from themselves. More accurate planning and more economical practice could no doubt be attained by federal publicity men if they would use for themselves the feasible techniques of measurement and uniform accounting of comparable costs.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

## CHAPTER VI

### CO-ORDINATION

FEDERAL publicity offices in Washington fall into two major classes: the large and the small, and, as federal administrative size is measured, not even the large office can claim much magnitude. The largest in 1937 was one of the oldest—i.e., that of the Department of Agriculture, including all its subdivisions. As usual, however, the Information Division of the Department of Agriculture cannot be called a typical publicity office. Only six of its forty-four specialists spend all their time on what could be called publicity as distinguished from teaching. The rest spend only 10 per cent of their time on publicity.<sup>1</sup> More typical of the “large” agencies are the so-called New Deal offices which employ five or more full-time specialists in publicity.

Among these Rooseveltian offices the largest in 1937 was that of Works Progress Administration, which employed on January 15, 1937, about forty publicity agents, twenty-eight of them in the division handling everything except press relations and an estimated twelve in the press section including the

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate Committee To Investigate the Executive Agencies of the Government, *Report on the Government Activities on Library, Information, and Statistical Services, No. 13* (prepared by the Brookings Institution [75th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office) Senate Committee Print]), p. 21. All figures on the size of staff for any office are taken from this report with the exception of an estimate for Works Progress Administration, which did not answer the Brookings request for information. The writer has eliminated from the Brookings figures personnel engaged in clerical, stenographic, or messenger service, since the staff of publicity specialists is considered the only pertinent one for consideration and, more important, since experience indicates that some offices included clerical personnel in their answers to Brookings while others did not, and the only way to get a valid set of comparable figures is to eliminate clerical help wherever it seems by title to have been counted.

clipping digest service.<sup>2</sup> In order of diminishing size of full-time staff of publicity specialists, the other "large" new offices were Social Security Board, 17; Federal Housing Administration, 15; Resettlement Administration, 10; Agricultural Adjustment Administration, 7; and Public Works Administration, 5. Aside from the Department of Agriculture, only three of the older agencies have as many as five full-time publicity agents. The Treasury Department has 5, handling information for all subdivisions; the Department of Commerce has 5; and the Department of Interior has 5 for all its subdivisions.

These specialists, so far as can be ascertained from the available data, are all in the category of symbol manipulators, as distinct from symbol handlers in Harold D. Lasswell's definition for purposes of analysis.<sup>3</sup> They participate in decisions on publicity programs; they select, in the preparation of releases, the symbols to be put before an audience; they determine the direction and volume of symbol-distribution. Within the broad classification of symbol manipulators, they would fall into the subcategory of "propagandists" in distinction to "intellectuals," or persons who "specialize on the circulation of contentious symbols, like professional revolutionaries, advocates of reform, and opponents of revolution and reform." The government publicity specialist "gets his living by using symbols to elicit collective responses."<sup>4</sup> Symbol handlers in the federal offices would include the typists, clerks, printers, mimeograph operators, motion-picture and still-photography technicians,

<sup>2</sup> The figure for the general information service is from the record of a Congressional Committee hearing, with the subtraction of twenty stenographers and clerks (U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, *First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937, Hearings before the Sub-committee of the Committee of Appropriations, in Charge of Deficiency Appropriations* [75th Cong. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937)], p. 150). The figure for the press section is an estimate arrived at by deducting from a total staff of twenty-seven in February, 1937, fifteen who were assumed to be doing clerical and stenographic work (personal interview, February 8, 1937).

<sup>3</sup> "Research on the Distribution of Symbol Specialists," *Journalism Quarterly*, June, 1935.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

actors and musicians, carpenters for exhibits, radio engineers, messengers, mail clerks, and others engaged in "embodying, duplicating or transporting the selected symbols." Unfortunately, the Brookings study for the Senate Committee to investigate the executive agencies, which has already been cited as the source of statements of the size of publicity staffs, did not include a count of the persons working as symbol handlers, so no estimate of their number can be made. The occasional inclusion of stenographers, clerks, and messengers in the Brookings report is too infrequent to justify conclusions, and, too, such aides as these would be only a part of the handler group. Printers, technicians in photography and radio, and all the other skilled workers attending the process of preparation and distribution of releases would not appear in a list of clerical employees.

The size of the "small" offices is best indicated by Table 5, which includes some of the typical small staffs. Major problems of organization are almost nonexistent in such small groups as the majority of federal publicity staffs in Washington. One or two persons, with clerical help, may get out the releases, plan programs, and maintain lines with the other divisions of their agency without setting up an elaborate system of sharing work. In the larger agencies, on the other hand, and in the departmental, as distinguished from the bureau offices, some organization and co-ordination is established on either or both of two bases: one, a regional division, and the other, a functional division of responsibility by subject or skill. The regional division may also apply to some of the offices which are classified here as "small" on the basis of their Washington staffs, for the Brookings figures did not include field staffs.

Nine of all the Washington offices which answered the questionnaire for this study reported some form of regional publicity organization. The agencies so reporting and the number of their regional agents are Soil Conservation Service, 11; U.S. Forest Service, 9; Farm Credit Administration, 12; Federal Housing Administration, 8; U.S. Reclamation Service, 2; Na-

tional Park Service, 4; Public Works Administration, Housing Division, 4; Resettlement Administration, 12; and Social Security Board, 12. Works Progress Administration has a publicity official attached to each state office and six regional agents who help these state officials with their programs. In general the regional publicity official does on a local basis the same work that is done on a national basis by the Washington

TABLE 5\*

NUMBER OF PUBLICITY SPECIALISTS ONLY, IN WASHINGTON AGENCIES  
EMPLOYING LESS THAN FIVE PUBLICITY AGENTS, OCTOBER 1, 1936

Agency	Full Time	Half-Time or More	Less than Half-Time
Emergency Conservation Work . . . . .	2	1	2
Farm Credit Administration . . . . .	2	1	2
Federal Communications Commission . . . . .	4		
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation . . . . .	1		
Federal Home Loan Bank Board . . . . .	4		
Federal Power Commission . . . . .			3
Federal Trade Commission . . . . .	2		1
Department of Justice . . . . .	1		1
Department of Labor . . . . .	1		1
National Labor Relations Board . . . . .		1 "partly"	
National Resources Committee . . . . .			2
Department of Navy . . . . .	No information	on time spent	
Post Office Department . . . . .	1		
Reconstruction Finance Corporation . . . . .		1	
Rural Electrification Administration . . . . .		5 "partly"	
Securities and Exchange Commission . . . . .	4		
Smithsonian Institution . . . . .		2 "partly"	
State Department . . . . .		2 "mostly"	
U.S. Tariff Commission . . . . .		2 "partly"	
Veterans' Administration . . . . .		3 "partly"	

\* Computed from Brookings Report on Information Offices.

office. He prepares releases for all the media available in his territory. He turns his hand to radio or a platform speech; he shows a motion picture to some sympathetic group and asks the theater exhibitors in his sector to show a short film; he writes releases for the newspapers and occasionally he turns out an article for some regional magazine.

Co-ordination within the publicity organization itself, even when there are regional offices, is still simple when measured

against the prodigious complexity that some federal offices must face. The regional information agent sends reports to Washington and to other regional offices periodically telling what he has done. Sometimes an exceptionally successful scheme of distributing releases will be discovered by a regional man and picked up by other regions and by Washington. The discovery by one regional official that electrical transcriptions on conservation can be used in schoolrooms as well as over broadcasting stations and the development by another of a particularly good leaflet advertising farms for sale by government quickly gained recognition in Washington and in the other regions. Washington serves as a clearinghouse for some information, serves to develop and digest overall policy, and sends the regional men suggestions and criticisms or brings the regional men to Washington for conferences. In no case is the publicity office burdened with a large staff subdivided into many segments either in the field or in Washington.

The distribution of activity according to subjects is found most noticeably in the departmental offices which have under them publicity offices attached to subordinate bureaus. The Department of Agriculture, so far as its publicity work goes, the Department of Interior, and the Department of Commerce are good examples of this. All releases, with the exception of those such as motion pictures in Agriculture and Interior and radio programs in Agriculture which are prepared outside the publicity office, are written in the bureau office and sent through the central departmental office. In most cases, few changes are made by the central editor, but a uniform policy is maintained by the central scrutiny of releases.

The most common scheme of functional subdivision, in the ten offices out of thirty-nine which have any at all, is one by media or skill required. Agricultural Adjustment Administration calls its segments "Publication and Reports," "Press," "Regional Contacts," and "Correspondence, Records and Printing." Soil Conservation Service is organized by press and radio relations, visual information, editorial work, and service



supply of printing, procurement, and distribution. Farm Credit Administration has an educational service, a publications service, a press service, and a clerical-stenographic service. Resettlement Administration has an editorial section, a photography section, special publications, radio, and motion-picture sections. Works Progress Administration has two major divisions, Press and Information, each with subdivisions. Federal Housing Administration has an editorial section to write releases for newspapers and magazines, a press digest section to clip and report what is printed about F.H.A., a section to publish the house organ, and a speakers' bureau to co-ordinate speeches and to write them if requested. Social Security Board has probably the most impressive organization in terms of subdivisions. Under a Director through an Associate Director are a division of business information, an education division, inquiry division, and library. The Director supervises firsthand the regional division, press service, publication division, and labor information division. Under the publications division are the editorial section, distribution section, press digest, reference files, and exhibits.

The one factor of co-ordination most generally true of all publicity offices, whether subdivided or not, is that Washington releases clear through a central office of the agency. Thirty-two offices report such central control, and of the six which do not have complete central clearance, two clear all except one or two types of releases.

#### CO-ORDINATION WITHIN THE AGENCY

If the problems of co-ordination within the publicity office itself are small, as concluded above, more significant questions might be raised for the higher levels of organization within the agency as a whole and within the federal administration. At these levels the technical and theoretical considerations from a study of public administration appear. First, co-ordination at the agency level will be examined, and, following that, a pro-

posal for co-ordination of publicity activities in the whole national administration will be suggested.

Writers on organization more or less agree that public relations is a staff function, in distinguishing between line, or doing, and staff, or learning, functions.<sup>5</sup> Since the purpose of a definition is to provide a common vocabulary for describing something, this designation of publicity as a staff function is useful, even though full agreement among students as to precise designations of staff and line remains to be reached. Certainly, the publicity office performs a staff function when it advises the executive on the probable effects of some decision, presumably after research and analysis; when it is studying the agency's program as a whole to see which parts of it need to be explained to the public; when it is publishing a house organ to develop the invaluable sense of common purpose; when it is anonymously representing the executive before the court of public opinion to which he is responsible and to which his political party is responsible.

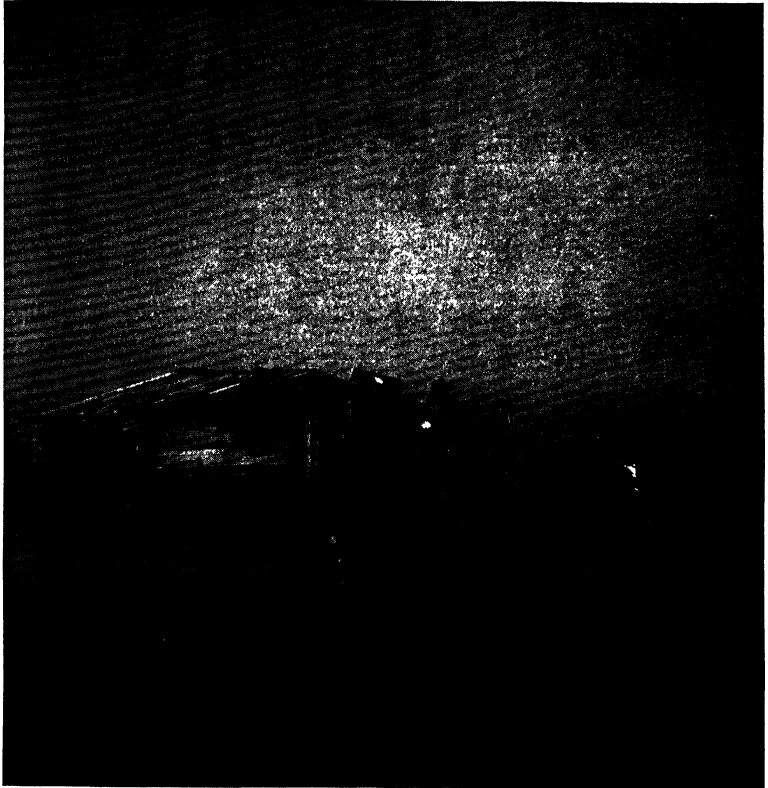
The last of these services, i.e., sharing the responsibility of the executive, is perhaps its most important staff function. In our present culture events and policies are attributed invariably to persons. The President is responsible for an uncle's losing his job; the Mayor is going to raise hell with the gas com-

<sup>5</sup> Public relations is called a staff function by Marshall E. Dimock (*Modern Politics and Administration* [New York: American Book Co., 1937], pp. 245 and 247); by John M. Gaus ("Theory of Organization," in Gaus, Leonard D. White, and Dimock, *Frontiers of Public Administration* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936], p. 71); and by the President's Committee on Administrative Management (*Report with Special Studies* [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937], p. 19). Luther Gulick disagrees, saying: "The important point of confusion in considering line and staff has arisen in speaking of the budget director, the purchasing agent, the controller, the public relations secretary as 'staff' officers. On the basis of the definition it is clear that they are all line officers. They have important duties of direction and control. When administrative responsibility and power are added to any staff function, that function thereby becomes immediately and completely a line function. There is no middle ground" ("The Theory of Organization," in Gulick and L. Urwick [eds.], *Papers on the Science of Administration* [New York: Institute of Public Administration, 1937], p. 31).

pany; the Secretary of State favors peace, therefore we will have peace; the Secretary of Labor is a woman who speaks with broad *a's*, hence cannot understand labor negotiations, so sit-down strikes are prolonged. "Write me at the White House if you are about to lose your home." The responsible executive is not a fiction in representative government: he cannot escape personal responsibility. The folkways and the media which provide the news and discussion to conform to the folkways demand the head of the executive when things go wrong and heap praise on him if he is satisfactory. There is in the public mind no such thing as a complicated, impersonal administrative machine that endures in unchanging competence regardless of the name or political color of the executive at the central desk. It is no wonder that meeting such responsibility is the major care of a public executive, that his every decision must be considered in the light of how it will strike the audience. Nor is it remarkable that the publicity office in this tense staff duty should be very close to the executive, watching his every move, knowing of changes in policy as soon as they are decided, advising on the appearance of things, maintaining a continuity of policy to avoid contradictions, working in general to show that the executive is doing his job well and in the public interest.

All the thirty-one agencies for which information on this point was gathered have placed their publicity offices in staff positions near the top executive.<sup>6</sup> Publicity in this sense is on a par with legal counseling, personnel, finance, and general administrative co-ordination and direction. Ten of the agencies have given to publicity officials titles of assistant to the top executive. In several cases the physical location of the publicity office is in the same corridor with the chief of the agency. This is especially noticeable in the newer buildings in the execu-

<sup>6</sup> Proximity to the executive and the place of the publicity office in the organization as a whole are indicated in charts and text descriptions of the organizations in the *United States Government Manual* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936). Titles, interviews, special charts supplied by officials, and letters provide more confirmation of this point.



FARMER AND SONS WALKING IN FACE OF DUST STORM, CIMARRON  
COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

Many farmers who had to leave their homes in the dust bowl became clients of Resettlement Administration. The cause of their need for aid was given wide publicity through pictures. (Photo by Arthur Rothstein.)



tive triangle where some press agents sit in paneled magnificence in offices alongside the suites for chiefs.

As a staff office sharing equally with other major divisions in the agency the task of carrying out a program, the publicity office presents no distinctive problems of structural, as compared with psychological, co-ordination in its relations with other divisions. Forms can be routed, authority to sign orders can be delegated, and agreements on division of function and power can be reached with comparatively little loss of time and energy through mechanical friction. When the structure of organization gives the chief executive more than the well-known five or six subordinates, as many as he can effectively supervise, adjustments can be made within the existing structure or, rarely, the agency can be reorganized to make the plan match the practice.<sup>7</sup>

Not so easy, however, is the more important personal co-ordination in understanding of and loyalty to a common purpose, which is, as theorists agree, the basic element of successful co-ordination. If this emotional amity exists among the men and women who do the work in an agency, from the top executive to the messenger boy, ideas and services will be exchanged freely and with profit for the whole. The mechanical organization can be adjusted to care for evolution in purpose and technique; the efficient distribution of duties and authority can be made despite even that most powerful deterrent to good administration, vested interests jealously guarded. If the people involved do not share an understanding of common purpose, no amount of tinkering with the structure of organization will produce effective co-ordination.

Here, in this intangible realm of the human factor, lies the really serious and distinctive problem of co-ordination of the publicity function with the agency as a whole. More specifically, it is the problem of the too common psychological gap between the publicity man and the line or technical man in inter-

<sup>7</sup> V. A. Graicunas, "Relationship in Organization," in Gulick and Urwick (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 181.

preparing the role of the agency and in agreeing to help each other with their unlike tasks.<sup>8</sup>

"We are working for the public," the publicity man is likely to say. "It is my job to keep that public informed of what we are doing to carry out the policy handed us by Congress. We are also operating in a representative democracy, governed by propaganda. If we are to be able to continue to do the job set for us by Congress, we must keep our particular public convinced that our objective is a good one, and we do this by putting out better propaganda than our enemies, either those in the public or those in Congress. In public administration there is no such thing as ability to work in an insulated cubby-hole, removed from the pressure of opinion for or against what we're doing. Whether we like it or not, we are subject to the precarious and sometimes whimsical insecurity of working for bosses, the public, and Congress, who are never rational and hence must be told constantly that we are doing our job in their interest. In actual practice, this means that I, as an expert in telling the public, must be able to advise you, the operating staff, on how to approach the public, what to say and how to say it in order to put it across. I should write your speeches and tell you what to say and what not to say in press conferences. It means too that you should tell me constantly what you're doing so I may know whether to pass the word on to the public. You may not think that what you're doing is news, but I will know, and I can assure you that the best possible way of getting to the public through the available media of large circulation is to take advantage of every possible news item that can be found and used to our credit."

The nonpublicity official may answer: "Yes, we are working for the public, but since the public forms its judgments in irrational ways, there is really no point in our trying to explain what we are doing and why. The job has to be done. It's more

<sup>8</sup> Generalizations about the relationship between publicity and line officials are based upon interviews with government publicity men, and specific sources are necessarily confidential.

important for us to spend our full time on doing the job than to dissipate part of our time in keeping you publicity men informed of what we're doing. You simply add to the red tape that makes work almost impossible in a bureaucracy, with your insistence on seeing our speeches and getting copies of our records and reports. And even if we should need to reach the public, we can make a much more accurate report than you can because we are close to the facts and you are once removed."

Basically, the conflict is a matter of emotional patterns. "Every highly trained technician," Luther Gulick says, "particularly in the learned professions, has a profound sense of omniscience and a great desire for complete independence in the service of society."<sup>9</sup> Every expert publicity man, one might add, has a pervasive impulse to draw attention to his cause and a great desire to get credit in the service of society. He sees the work of the nonpublicity official as primarily a "story" to be used in getting approval and support from the audience for his agency's personnel, program, and administrative policy, and, in some cases, for the over-all policy of the political administration. He thinks always of the "publicity angle" in any event or decision.

Sometimes the results of not considering the publicity angle appear openly in some blunder. When Mrs. J. Borden Harri-man was sworn in as Minister to Norway, she naïvely disclosed that the State Department was secretly discussing a trade treaty with Norway.

Michael J. McDermott, the department's press contact man, stood at her side. An interviewer asked if she expected to negotiate a trade agreement with Norway.

"Oh, that's already being done," she replied.

Mr. McDermott cleared his throat nervously.

"There's been no official announcement about that yet, Madame Minister," he reminded her diplomatically.

"Oh, but I thought everybody knew that," the envoy said. Presumably she still was unaware of the enormity of her indiscretion.

"I am vastly interested in Norway," she went on. . . .

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 10.



Mr. McDermott was determined, however, to clear up the trade agreement situation. He interrupted:

"We have only been exploring the matter thus far. It is not quite correct to say that the negotiations are in progress."

"Oh," observed Mrs. Harriman, "I see."<sup>10</sup>

The Post Office Department particularly seems to be under an evil conjure. In the vexatious summer heat of Washington at a time when the Department was under strong attack for refusing to deliver food by parcel post into the strike-besieged plants of the Republic Steel Corporation, a nonpublicity official told an inquiring reporter to "go straight to hell," upon being asked a question. Later in the same manner of antagonizing the press, he blamed the newspapers for the attacks on the Department. "It looks," he is reported to have said, "as if the papers have been hired by the Republic Steel Corporation and the other companies to bring pressure on the administration and get the President to settle the strike."<sup>11</sup> Such statements, of course, do not help the agency's publicity office in its relations with the press.

Another outburst that could hardly have been approved by other officials, including the publicity agent, was reported in connection with the disastrous crash of the Pan American Airways "Samoan Clipper" in January, 1938. The aeronautical adviser to the United States Maritime Commission, a former director of Pan American Airways, is reported to have sent to a dozen-odd publications a "furious 458-word telegram denouncing P.A.A. as insatiably ambitious and monopolistic, blaming the seven deaths on P.A.A.'s 'tragic blunder of overexpansion.' " The official hastily retracted his telegram, the report added.<sup>12</sup>

If the adoption of formal procedure indicates victory in an argument, the publicity men in Washington have won their case against fellow-officials. Twenty-nine of the thirty-seven

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, May 16, 1937, sec. 1, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, June 6, 1937, sec. 1, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Time*, XXXI, No. 4 (January 24, 1938), 40.

offices which answered this question in the questionnaire report that nonpublicity officials have been instructed formally, as by an administrative order, to co-operate with publicity officials in preparing and distributing publicity. Only eight agencies have failed to adopt such rules of procedure. In twenty-nine agencies for which the questionnaire supplied information, all speeches and interviews by nonpublicity officials are reviewed by the publicity office. The orders governing the relationship of publicity to nonpublicity officials range from a mere request for co-operation to detailed instructions to send to the publicity office photographs of projects, to send reports on activities and progress, and to display posters. Some agencies require all officials to route through the publicity office replies to outside requests for information that might be used in a public distribution. Some require any official who plans to make a prepared public speech to send a copy, as far ahead of delivery as possible, to the publicity office in Washington or in his region. The purpose of this review of speeches is twofold: (1) The publicity agent can make sure that the speech conforms to general policy and can protect the chief executive against contradiction by a subordinate; and (2) he can have the speech mimeographed and distributed to the press ahead of delivery in the hope of getting news space for it. Twenty-eight of the thirty-nine offices which answered the question reported that copies of all intradepartmental reports and communications that might have news interest are sent by routine to the information officials.

But this still is dealing with technical organization, in the sense of building grooves for the orderly discipline of the wheels of routine. In the tension of human relations when basic outlooks are in conflict, as they are between publicity men and other officials, effective co-ordination must be gained through personal amenities. At times the personal understanding must be stronger than any formal regulations could possibly inspire. The publicity official must be a paragon of tact and influential affability. He must be able to persuade a reticent line officer

that it is his public duty to give up some item of information; he must decide whether to use gentle pressure in a quiet tone, or, failing success with persuasion, "to bust ahead hell for leather," as one expressed it. In any event, he must know that pressure through persuasion, whether soft or rough, will be effective when commands under authority of a rule will merely start a long and tedious delay through sabotage.

Since in our culture events and conditions are habitually personalized, media demand names for their columns. The publicity agent must supply names as the source of policies or, at least, the source of news; and since many an honest official hesitates to take credit for some achievement that several have made or, more acutely, declines to "stick his neck out" with a questionable statement, the press agent must overcome occasional protest against using names. One may have sympathy with the poor scientist who never knows the final answer but who appears in a press release as having made a discovery which will be questioned by his scientific colleagues. Only the sensitive soul who has felt the nakedness of being popularized can fully understand the humiliation of thinking that people who know the whole complexity of the subject will consider the popular statement the word of either a fraud or a fool.<sup>13</sup> News, however, is news; if the way to get a point across to the media and public is by putting a flashy note to a sober statistical statement, by showing a breathless excitement over some ordinary trend, or even by putting words of simplicity into the mouth of a learned man, the publicity agent must do it in fulfillment of his dual duty to serve the media and to get space for his agency. Having committed his crime, he must be able to convince the source person that he was not injured. Let no one

<sup>13</sup> "Someone over at the Agriculture Department mentioned casually something about a department explorer-collector. . . . Whenever one comes in to report, newsmen bedevil him—not so much for what he has explored or collected but for color stuff from his experiences. What they generally write, it has been pointed out, gives the sense that explorer-collectors live in lands where life is a dream and the birds sing all day long" (Scott Hart, "The Federal Diary," *Washington Post*, February 18, 1937, p. 17).

think that this conflict over popularization at the expense of precise accuracy is not a constant fact in the realm of personal co-ordination. It extends even to such apparently harmless practices as using the new pictographs. Engineers and some statisticians will say that pictorial statistics are not accurate to the last digit and hence should not be used. Publicists maintain that a drawing of a dynamo to represent a million kilowatts in round numbers gets more attention and tells the story with sufficient accuracy not to be misleading.<sup>14</sup> Photographs can be another sore point. Mere record photographs of a project or problem are only rarely good for news or magazine use, but the technician may insist that, like pictographs, the photograph with news value is not accurate. So the argument goes in all phases of popularizing weighty factual data.

A problem of personal co-ordination opposite to the reticent or perfectionist technician is the line official who wants publicity for himself regardless of the effect on the organization as a whole. The publicity man must carefully give credit where due as far as possible if jealousy is to be avoided. Another difficult line official is the one who, having no experience with news values, thinks that any story which he considers worthy will be printed by the newspapers. He is the official who may think the publicity agent is incompetent if he cannot get space for insignificant releases.

The real test of co-ordination within an agency is whether the daily, routine, incessant disagreement between men within the agency can be adjusted in the interest of the organization as a whole. In those Washington agencies where such co-ordination exists, it is reached through the age-old process of friendly compromise after explanation and through the recognition of a common enterprise in which the publicity office has a necessary role. Perhaps most important is a genuine understanding by the nonpublicity official of the publicity agent's role and a belief that his expert advice is essential in the organ-

<sup>14</sup> Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language, the First Rules of Isotype* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1936), pp. 22-32.

ization. If this exists, the line official will listen without resentment when the publicity official instructs him in what questions will probably be asked at a press conference, arranges for photographers to shoot his picture, takes his cold facts of progress and blows on them with the warm and sometimes ecstatic breath of news interest, or annoys him with requests for reports and pictures which take time to prepare. He may even meet the supreme test of harmony by admitting that the publicity man can write a better speech or article for the line official's signature than can an executive inexperienced in handling words, and he may dutifully deliver the speech or submit the article without substituting his own clichés.<sup>15</sup> If the line official does not recognize that publicity is essential, and especially if he thinks of himself as a skilled publicist when actually he has had no technical experience in the use of media, the unified and effective use of the publicity office will be impossible.

On the other hand, the publicity official as well must be tolerant of ideas and practices from the line if he is properly enacting his role as a staff adviser and not trying to assume the forefront practice of representing the agency. After all, it is the line official who meets the public. There may be five hundred line officials to one publicity man, so that the physical job of meeting the public face to face could never be assumed by the publicity staff. The public wants to hear the line official and not a professional publicist; and the media serving the public demand access to the responsible executive, resenting wrathfully any prolonged blockade of his door.<sup>16</sup> Certainly in the

<sup>15</sup> Ghost writers and executives work in various ways. Sometimes the executive will write a rough first draft which is polished into vibrant language by the ghost. At other times, the ghost simply takes a few facts in an interview and builds the piece around these. A third way allows the ghost to write the piece without reference to the executive until it is submitted for approval. Tension is likely to develop when the executive inserts his own favorite words and phrases to the damage of the clear, compact style of the trained writer.

<sup>16</sup> When Henry J. Morgenthau, Jr., was new as Acting Secretary of the Treasury, he bluntly directed reporters to get news only from Herbert Gaston,

field services the line official can appropriately be the source of news, perhaps, as in some agencies, with periodic advice from the publicity office on how to get more distribution by taking advantage of news items frequently overlooked by the layman. Any attempt at extreme co-ordination which would prevent, say, postmasters, directors of C.C.C. camps, park superintendents, or superintendents of minor work projects from giving out local news without reference to a publicity expert at headquarters would defeat itself by its own needless clumsiness and would stir up a tremendous resentment of censorship.

The best approach to co-ordination within an agency is to reject all but a skeleton of necessary mechanical regulations and to depend principally on the human factors of congenial, frank understanding between line and publicity officials. This understanding must include a mutual recognition of the fact that publicity is a necessary function but that it is not to exceed its proper place by attempting to displace the line official as the front man.

#### CO-ORDINATION AT THE LEVEL OF NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

It is no longer news to say that there is no sufficient co-ordination in the sprawling wilderness of the whole federal administration. President Roosevelt said, in introducing the most recent report on administrative reorganization:

There are over 100 separate departments, boards, commissions, authorities, agencies and activities through which the work of Government is being carried on. Neither the President nor the Congress can exercise effective supervision and direction over such a chaos of establishments, nor can overlapping, duplication, and contradictory policies be avoided.<sup>17</sup>

the Treasury publicity chief. The outcry was so immediate and vehement that Stephen Early, the President's press secretary, is reported to have secured intervention by the President in order to soothe ruffled feelings (William E. Berch-told, "Press Agents of the New Deal," *New Outlook*, CLXIV, No. 1 [July, 1934], 29).

<sup>17</sup> U.S. President's Committee on Administrative Management, *op. cit.*, p. iv.

Publicity offices exist in about half the hundred agencies, and, as shown above, the publicity office is merely an integral part of its agency, a combination of internal adviser and sometimes outside messenger for the agency. It does not possess the power to do anything about organization either in its own agency or, much less, in the federal administration as a whole. It reflects only the morale of its own single agency, hence the lack of national co-ordination among agencies is just as true for the publicity offices within the agencies as it is for the agencies themselves.

Often the result is confusion and contradiction in the public releases of agencies lacking knowledge of each other. "Many officials jabber too much. Each thinks of himself, forgetting he is merely a member of a team."<sup>18</sup> Reporters frantically trying to cover the hundreds of news sources in Washington will press officials or their publicity agents for a release which may contradict a release from another agency. Officials, even Cabinet members, in press conference may answer identical questions without having time to see what a fellow-official will say.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 1—There appeared to be a difference of opinion between Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Secretary of Commerce Daniel C. Roper today as to whether American merchant ships should call at Shanghai for the present.

Mr. Roper at his press conference expressed the opinion that the tension had now eased to a point where there would be no danger to American ships that wished to call there.

Without taking issue in any way with his colleague, Mr. Hull indicated that nothing has happened to change his concurrence in the danger warning that Admiral Harry E. Yarnell, commanding the Asiatic Fleet, issued to the American merchant marine immediately after the bombing of the liner *President Hoover*.<sup>19</sup>

While there is nothing reprehensible in Cabinet members' disagreeing, even in public (their very disagreement shows independence and freedom from censorship), the firm or person

<sup>18</sup> W. M. Kiplinger, "What Can You Believe?" *Today*, III, No. 5 (November 24, 1934), 4.

<sup>19</sup> *New York Times*, September 2, 1937, p. 3.

wanting to ship or travel to Shanghai in those troubled days would have found small comfort in these quoted opinions. A taxpayer planning his affairs for the future would not get much assurance from a proposal for higher taxes by the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, presumably speaking for the administration, followed the next day by opposition to higher taxes from the President via the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and a week later by a direct statement of the President in press conference that no tax increase would be recommended.<sup>20</sup> Or witness the President's having to withdraw a suggestion for an excise tax on sugar which would have violated a reciprocal trade agreement with Cuba. "Mr. Roosevelt based his message on a report from the Department of Agriculture. . . . At the State Department it was said that the proposed excise tax would appear to be in violation of the agreement. . . ." <sup>21</sup> The President, it may be added, gracefully confessed that he was completely out of his depth in the sugar question and expressed surprise that he had recommended a contradictory tax. Government is expected to provide reliable information and advice, but it cannot do this without agreement in its releases.

Again publicity may reflect a conscious, even deliberate, conflict of policy between separate agencies which might better be settled outside the public prints if the citizen-client is to know what the administration's policy is and where to fix the responsibility for it. The National Bituminous Coal Commission argues openly in press releases against the Interstate Commerce Commission's approval of freight-rate increases on bituminous coal after having lost an argument in the usual procedure of a hearing. Here the Coal Commission appears as chief advocate for the bituminous coal industry against an administrative decision favoring the railroads.<sup>22</sup> Where could

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, March 17, 1937, p. 8; March 24, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, March 3, 1937, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> The Coal Commission was apparently aware of the questionable propriety of going to the newspapers with its protest against the Interstate Commerce Commission's decision. "When the Interstate Commerce Commission made pub-



the public look for responsibility in another case when representatives of two agencies tried to shift blame to each other in a Senate Committee hearing? A congressional committee hearing is treated as a form of publicity release, and some agencies issue ahead of time mimeographed press releases of prepared statements which officials are to make before the committee. The Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys began asking questions about a \$2,300-per-year voucher clerk in National Park Service who, in quixotic disdain for the mysteries of red tape, had set up an imaginary C.C.C. camp in Shenandoah National Park and collected for himself \$84,000 in salaries "paid" to fictitious persons. For three and a half years he had lived well, played the stock market and races, and with true American virtue he had bought a house. It was a good news story; the press was watching it closely; the administrative officials were appearing before the public when they appeared before the Senate Committee. The Associate Director of the National Park Service said the fraudulent vouchers should have been discovered in the War Department, where the payments to C.C.C. personnel were actually made. The next day the Inspector General of the Army said the War Department finance officer had been instructed to honor any vouchers presented by persons officially designated by the offices handling C.C.C. operations. This voucher clerk was an authorized person, which meant, in other words, that the Army said the Park Service was responsible.<sup>23</sup>

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lic its decision about ten days ago increasing freight rates on bituminous coal . . . this [National Bituminous Coal] Commission refrained from making immediate public comment, although it was urged to do so by many persons and by the press. In taking this position the Commission was motivated by two primary reasons. First, it did not believe that the interests of the bituminous coal industry or orderly procedure would be served best by one Commission of the United States Government hastily criticizing in public print a judicial determination of another Commission of government. Second, it felt that . . . the problem . . . required further mature study and full discussion . . . before steps should be taken. . . ." (U.S. Bituminous Coal Commission, press release No. 155, November 2, 1937; see also press release No. 161, November 9, 1937, for a review of the whole controversy).

<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, January 18, 1937, p. 7; January 19, 1937, p. 4.

Such lack of co-ordination as here displayed is, of course, not limited to publicity practices alone. The cause of confusion lies much deeper in the lack of co-ordination of executive policy generally, in the absence of effective executive supervision over commissions, in the absence of a presidential staff to encourage consultation and agreement among executive officers. Publicity merely reflects underlying policy and practice. If co-ordination is lacking in the fundamental operations, it will be lacking in the publicity content. The point to be made in connection with publicity is that when confusion exists in the policies of executive agencies, the resulting contradictory publicity robs the public of reliable information and also damages the reputation of administration.

The questionnaire for this study asked for a report on three practices relevant to mechanical co-ordination, if not to the attainment of loyalty to a common purpose among agencies in the whole of national administration. In reporting on the existence of conferences with publicity officials of other agencies, only four of the forty-four who answered the question indicated the use of this device. In an effort to discover whether equipment or personnel with special skills were shared, the second question asked what services or supplies were received regularly from other agencies. Four out of forty-four offices regularly received services from other agencies, though in only one of the four cases was the service significant for co-ordination. Rural Electrification Administration used mailing lists from the Extension Service of the Department of Agriculture and from the Office of Education, Department of Interior. The third question asked informants to list the publicity offices of other agencies (besides the U.S. Information Service) which regularly were sent copies of all releases. Only seven out of forty-four agencies listed specific offices to which they sent releases. Undoubtedly, as some officials reported, many more send their releases to other agencies but do not know it, since the names have been buried in a general mailing list of large proportions. The answers to this third question should not be

taken as entirely accurate, but the small number of publicity agents who are sufficiently aware of exchanging news to answer the question is indicative of the lackadaisical attitude toward such co-ordination.<sup>24</sup>

The need for co-ordination among the various publicity offices in Washington is not merely a matter of academic concern. T. Swann Harding has counted twenty-four federal agencies that supply information to the consumer. They are Food and Drug Administration, Federal Trade Commission, Bureau of Home Economics, Post Office Department (via fraud orders), Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Bureau of Animal Industry, Consumers Counsel of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Consumers Project in the Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Bureau of Fisheries, Home Economics Educational Service, Bureau of Dairy Industry, Electric Home and Farm Authority, Farm Credit Administration, Federal Housing Administration, Federal Power Commission, Rural Electrification Administration, Resettlement Administration, Tennessee Valley Authority, and the U.S. Tariff Commission.<sup>25</sup> Arch A. Mercey lists thirteen agencies dealing with land use without trying to exhaust the total.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Co-ordination through exchanging copies of releases might have prevented this coincidence of two releases within three days of each other about the same story but from separate agencies. For release Sunday, January 23, 1938, the Office of Indian Affairs, Department of Interior, launched a feature story: "From out of the silent and frozen Arctic there came today to the Office of Indian Affairs . . . an epic tale of one man's perilous journey across the ice of Bering Strait and of the tragic fate that befell his companion. . . . The Office of Indian Affairs learned of the dramatic story from Dr. John P. Harrington of the Smithsonian Institution. . . ." Editors received from the Smithsonian, for release in afternoon papers, Wednesday, January 26, 1938, the same story: "It is possible to walk between North America and Asia . . . according to Dr. John P. Harrington, Smithsonian Institution ethnologist. . . ." This confusion is more comical than typical, it should be added.

<sup>25</sup> T. Swann Harding, "Where Can Consumers Get the Facts?" *Christian Century*, October 14, 1936, p. 1358.

<sup>26</sup> "Modernizing Federal Publicity," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 3 (July, 1937), 87.

Agencies within the Department of Interior alone are engaged in reclaiming land, settling farmers on new land, homesteading, rehabilitating Indian farmers, and putting land to recreational uses.<sup>27</sup> These are all intimately related to the subjects of programs in the Department of Agriculture, National Resources Committee, Resettlement Administration (which is now in the Department of Agriculture), and Army Engineering Corps. At one time housing was the subject of five distinct agencies in Washington, while to revive and rebuild Gainesville, Georgia, after a tornado struck it, the President, who happened to be at Warm Springs, Georgia, ordered into immediate activity the National Emergency Council, Reconstruction Finance Corporation, Public Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, Army Engineering Corps, Red Cross, and Federal Housing Administration.<sup>28</sup>

If the general problems are similar for all agencies approaching the same subject, the problems of publicizing the subject are similar, for, to repeat, publicity merely reflects the agency's work. The interwoven unity of the subject is, in fact, shown by actual routine conditions in some of the publicity offices. Farm Credit Administration, for one, frequently has to refer a questioner to some other federal lending agency. The citizen who needs to borrow government money knows nothing and cares less about loans being made by various agencies. He wants "the government" to do something for him; he has heard perhaps a broadcast or seen a news release mentioning Farm Credit Administration, so he writes there for information when he should be writing Resettlement Administration or some other agency.<sup>29</sup> Some four thousand citizens write the President each day because he is to them "the government." Their letters have to be routed from his office to the proper subject

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of Interior, *Annual Report, 1934* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934).

<sup>28</sup> "Tornado over Gainesville," *Architectural Forum*, LXVI, No. 2 (February, 1937), 154-57.

<sup>29</sup> Personal interview, February 5, 1937.

agencies. Or to take another illustration of the mesh, the Department of Agriculture's information office finds that its volume of demand for information directly increases with an increase in related activities in other agencies. Thus, the Agriculture office had to increase its output of releases on erosion, diets, farm buildings, farm economics, and other topics as a result of soil-erosion work by the Department of Interior, various phases of the Tennessee Valley Authority's program, the relief program which created an awareness of and need for information on diet, the housing drive which stimulated the demand for information on farm building, the Emergency Conservation Work's stimulation of interest in conservation work, and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's crop-reduction program.<sup>30</sup>

#### SOME EXISTING CO-ORDINATION

One trouble with discussing the lack of co-ordination in federal administration is that the observers of management, who write studies such as this one, are expected to recommend improvements. By the time they have built up their picture of weaknesses, the reader is likely to wonder whether the machinery works at all.

Obviously, the publicity offices do work together rather frequently, and if the animus of attacks on them is indicative of their success, they have done an effective job. More unity of objective has been observed in practice than would be expected from the loose and individualistic dispersion of the offices in organization. Co-ordination has occurred, not as a result of deliberate interlocking of the agencies, but, rather, spasmodically, for fitful periods soon forgotten, and by way of the old familiar pattern whereby men of good will co-operate when it seems desirable and when someone with initiative thinks of the possibility.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, *Agricultural Department Appropriation Bill for 1936, Hearing before the Sub-committee of the House Committee on Appropriations* (74th Cong., 1st sess. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935]) pp. 70-73.

Such co-ordination may become dramatic in time of disaster when many agencies converge to their various parts of a total job, as when a Gainesville, Georgia, has to be rebuilt or when the periodic floods of the Mississippi Valley become catastrophic. In the great Ohio-Mississippi flood of 1937 help was given by the Works Progress Administration, Red Cross, Coast Guard, Public Health Service, Treasury agents, Narcotics Bureau (sending drugs to the area), Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Army.<sup>31</sup> Publicity releases on the work of the various agencies were not centralized, but some of the Washington offices, which were issuing releases for every newspaper edition, did exchange copies of their stories during the period. A Works Progress release, for example, would be sent by messenger to the Washington offices of the Red Cross and the Army and to the White House in exchange for copies of releases from those offices. The W.P.A. releases were based on last-minute telephone reports on the activities of W.P.A. from the state directors in the flood area. The directors were telephoned two or three times a day.<sup>32</sup> Similar co-ordination was followed in covering the Florida hurricane and the drought. When the President sent a special committee on a tour of the Great Plains, publicity men from at least two agencies worked together. One came from Rural Electrification Administration because Morris L. Cooke, Administrator of the agency, was chairman of the Committee; a photographer came from Resettlement Administration because Rexford G. Tugwell, Administrator, was a member of the Committee.

Even in the relative tranquillity of Washington routine, some co-ordination takes place through gentlemen's agreements, especially when the subject is one that cuts across the work of several agencies. News releases summarizing reports of the National Resources Committee are verified by the specialists in various agencies who wrote the original report.<sup>33</sup> In

<sup>31</sup> *Time*, February 8, 1937, pp. 17-20.

<sup>32</sup> Personal interview, February 8, 1937.

<sup>33</sup> Personal interview, January 18, 1937.

publicizing soil conservation, the Soil Conservation Service will have its releases checked by the bureau in its own Department of Agriculture which is primarily concerned with the topic. Thus a release on terracing would be read by someone in the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering; a release on soil factors in erosion, by someone in the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils; a release on the wild-life aspects of allowing the growth of brush, by someone in the Bureau of Biological Survey; or a release on forests in soil saving, by someone in the Forest Service. If Soil Conservation Service wants to release a story on flood control, it goes outside its own department and sends the release to the Army for the approval of the engineers who build dams and have a long-established claim to the credit for flood control.<sup>34</sup>

Personal and occasional interagency co-ordination is no doubt better than none; but is it really healthy administration? It slows up the machinery of issuing releases, and often, not only in the case of soil conservation but in other agencies and subjects as well, it is arranged more to avoid offense in a jealous bureaucracy than to create a unified policy. Sending the Army Engineers a release to show them that their precious term "flood control" is not usurped (as compared with "flood prevention" which belongs to Soil Conservation Service or "flood repair" which belongs to Works Progress Administration) does nothing toward telling the public about the proper relative emphasis to be put on reforestation, on check-dams in little waters, on big dams, on levees and spillways, or on any of the other instruments of soil and flood remedies. In the midst of a disastrous flood, government is not given proper credit for what it is doing when media review, as a controversy, the basic issue of whether the Army was right in spending \$300,000,000 for its levee system or whether floods should not be stopped at their source in the tributaries.<sup>35</sup> The mere exchanging of releases offers small promise to any hope of achieving a real co-ordination in understanding. Still, such gentlemanly exchanges are

<sup>34</sup> Personal interview, February 11, 1937.

<sup>35</sup> *Time*, February 8, 1937, pp. 17-20.

considered helpful by some of the publicity agents because, while they slow up procedure, they at least prevent competitive publicity for credit in some cases and make for some harmony in a national organization that almost seems constructed for disharmony. If they cannot have understanding in their basic programs, they want, at least, the peace of observing each other's boundaries.

Other informal and erratic co-ordination takes place by the borrowing of technical services or such items as photographs and films. Again, this is accidental. As to photographs, there is no single library in Washington where the government photographer can discover what pictures on what subjects have been taken. Occasionally a publicity man will telephone and ask an office if it has a picture on a certain subject, but his road to getting the picture is a long and tedious one in case he has to call several offices. An inquiring reporter is, of course, equally handicapped when his paper wants a picture. If a government motion-picture director wants to borrow some film footage to cut in as economy, he must go to the various motion-picture offices without assurance that the shots he finds will be the best available unless he goes to all the offices.

Finally, co-ordination by courtesy and convenience takes place in a small and unplanned way whenever men get together and have a common interest. In Washington there is the beginning of a friendly, informal grouping of a few publicity men, though it is not yet significant enough to call it co-ordination. In the field, publicity men may meet occasionally at meetings which concern a number of agencies or at expositions where exhibits from a number of agencies have been assembled.

Two efforts at legal co-ordination should be mentioned before leaving the subject. Both were failures and have been abandoned in practice if not in form. The first was the requirement by law that all printing should be done at the Government Printing Office and that the Public Printer should decide ques-



tions of style.<sup>36</sup> With sufficient flexibility a great deal of co-ordination of technical services in publicity might have been achieved under these provisions. Actually the uniform style which was adopted made government reports and most other government printing monotonously unattractive. In the public mind, a government document became almost synonymous with a dull treatise to be read only as a duty when something had to be learned. The cure for the stagnant, wasteful dulness of routine printing was the emergency legislation of the Franklin Roosevelt administration which gave the President power to authorize expenditures for periodicals, newspapers and clippings, printing and binding, and other expenses necessary to accomplish the purposes of the relief act.<sup>37</sup> Under this power government publications issued by the emergency agencies have been made as attractive as commercial ones, but they have at the same time been removed from central co-ordination of the sort contemplated by the earlier provision on printing design.

The other abortive attempt at formal co-ordination was the authorization of a centralized publicity office in the National Emergency Council for reporting allotments and progress in the emergency program.<sup>38</sup> Each state office of N.E.C., in addition, was to be a clearinghouse for information about the federal program and was to serve upon request as the press bureau for any federal agency that needed the service.<sup>39</sup> Most agencies in the field chose to handle their own publicity so that the role of the N.E.C. as a state center to co-ordinate local publicity was minimized. The same development took place in Washington on a national scale. The United States Information Service, which was a part of the scheme, was not a central office to co-

<sup>36</sup> 28 U.S. Stat. 608, 622 (January 12, 1895).

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Congress, *Public Resolution No. 11, Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935*, sec. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Executive Order No. 7034, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, May 6, 1935.

<sup>39</sup> President's Committee on Administrative Management, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-83.

ordinate the publicity program of the New Deal, but a question-answering office. It made no effort to promote publicity. As a co-ordinator it did no more than collect all releases from the administrative agencies, records of hearings, reports, and any other source material that would help it answer the inquiries it received.<sup>40</sup> Nor did the N.E.C.'s office for publicity more clearly defined, in contrast to the passive role of the Information Service, achieve co-ordination of federal emergency publicity. The N.E.C. did its own publicity job, for itself, just as other agencies do, and it served well as an ear to the ground for the administration, through its Press Intelligence Division and less successfully through confidential reports from state directors, but it did not provide an approach to a unified program of publicity for a common objective.

To summarize the condition of co-ordination in general, it may be said that the publicity offices reflect the lack of co-ordination throughout federal administration, that what co-ordination exists is accidental and not sufficiently widespread to be adequate, and that the attempt to make the National Emergency Council a co-ordinating office in emergency publicity was a failure because it was never given a real chance.

#### POSSIBLE CHANGES FOR CO-ORDINATION

From the preceding discussion of co-ordination, one main conclusion recurs: Mechanical co-ordination is valuable only as an aid to the achievement of co-ordination in understanding and loyalty for a common purpose. This must be remembered in any consideration of possible changes to secure better co-ordination of publicity offices. No amount of shuffling units of the structure will improve matters if the spirit of unity is dead. The problem is, then, essentially one of getting through re-

<sup>40</sup> Oliver McKee, Jr., "Question Please?" *Today*, Vol. III, No. 24 (April 6, 1935); cf. also Stanley High, "You Can't Beat the Government," *Saturday Evening Post*, CCX, No. 21 (November 20, 1937), 34. High reports that the U.S. Information Service receives only 200 inquiries a day and that of these, only 40 per cent come from the public. The rest come 40 per cent from federal administrative agencies and 20 per cent from Congress.

organization understanding among the men who handle publicity.

The structural setting should provide above all for the grouping of men and functions to facilitate the satisfaction of common interests and needs. Toward this end the following organization is recommended.

1. *Publicity offices should be organized to explain and promote specific subjects and objectives, and not simply be attached, as now, to the agencies which exist in unco-ordinated organization.*<sup>41</sup>—

The wasteful procedure by which publicity men for several agencies dealing with soil conservation and flood control spend energy to avoid offending each other when they are all working for the same objective and with the same subject would approach the ridiculous, if we had not become accustomed to such confusion through all levels of government. It is difficult as well to see the logic or utility of having several publicity offices deal with different aspects of relief, old age assistance, rural rehabilitation, and public health when each of these subjects comes into almost any analysis of the general problem of welfare. A photograph of flood suffering taken by Works Progress Administration is a demonstration of the need for flood control just as much as if it had been taken by the Army. The rickets of underprivileged share-cropper children are the same rickets whether deplored by Resettlement Administration or by the Public Health Service. Bread lines are miserable sores on the national economy whether condemned by Works Progress Administration or by the Social Security Board.

The subjects dealt with by federal administration provide the basis for the most recent recommendation for national ad-

<sup>41</sup> In 1935, M. S. Eisenhower, Director of Information, Department of Agriculture, proposed that information writers in the Department be organized on a basis of the commodities (i.e., subjects) with which their releases dealt (U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Report of the Director of Information, 1935* [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935], p. 2). The Department of Agriculture handles such a variety of subjects that its problems of organizing the informational staff could be considered as similar to those for the entire administration's publicity organization.

ministrative reorganization. The President's Committee on Administrative Management proposes twelve departments, each handling one major subject category into which the President would fit the minor divergencies within certain agencies (those petty exceptions which so often destroy intelligent discussion of change).<sup>42</sup> Ideally, the publicity organization would conform to this proposed scheme, for publicity offices are primarily staff offices and should handle subjects as they are assigned to the major agencies. Thus, in the ideal plan, the Department of State publicity office would continue to provide information and make known the administration's program in foreign affairs. The Treasury office would promote the sale of securities, if needed; would make work easier for the tax collector by explaining how to pay and how the money would be used; would make fiscal announcements with skilled regard for their effect on the market and public confidence; and would handle any other news incidental to the fiscal operations of the government. The War and Navy offices, short of achieving the consolidation not advocated by the Committee, would continue as now to promote support for the Army and Navy through reporting their activities and to censor such items as photo-plays which they help produce. The Department of Justice would continue as now to promote uniform police administration in the nation and to publicize the federal police function, perhaps extending its scope to include other police than the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Justice office might well add to its crime news a continuous campaign to tell the public about the conditions and problems of judicial administration. The long-standing policy of the courts and the bar association to keep the judiciary "dignified," or a mystery, has meant that the judicial branch of government is the only one not held responsible for its acts. Yet there are many who say that judges act politically and should be held publicly responsible just as much as congressmen or administrative officials.

The Post Office Department's publicity office might promote

<sup>42</sup> President's Committee on Administrative Management, *op. cit.*

the use of the mails; and if the reorganization proposed by the Committee should expand the Department's function to include all communication, the publicity office could handle all information on this subject. The Committee also contemplates using post offices as the local centers for distributing federal information. In this plan the Department's publicity office might become an important factor in co-ordinating the distribution of releases.

The Department of Conservation (now called Interior) would have a publicity office promoting the use of national parks and lands, explaining the need for conserving public lands and water and mineral resources. Publicity from the Department of Agriculture would deal with the aspects of agriculture strictly defined, as it now does, but would relinquish publicity on topics more in the field of conservation and welfare. The Department of Commerce would continue its present publicizing of data from research and would add the promotion of fair-trade practices and punitive publicity for unfair practices. The Department of Labor, in addition to its present distribution of facts from research, might well serve the public with the nonpartisan information needed to decide the merits of a labor conflict. Labor, also, under the proposed reorganization, would administer the insurance phases of the Social Security Act and would have a large publicity task in keeping clients informed. News, promotion, education, or whatever it may be called concerning health, relief, education, and the general satisfaction of citizens' needs in the realm of personal and social welfare would be the objective of a unified publicity office in the Department of Social Welfare. This would be in contrast to the present disunity of publicity activities in these subjects. Finally, the present diffusion of publicity dealing with public works, e.g., housing or local allotments for improvements, would be replaced by a single publicity staff in the proposed Department of Public Works.

The present atomized structure of some fifty publicity offices of various sizes, many of them dealing with the same general

subjects, might be reduced to twelve departmental offices dealing with subjects assigned on a rational basis. The organization proposed by the President's Committee for major departments is equally suitable for publicity offices. The changes involved in reorganization would be about the same for the publicity offices as for their agencies. If, in the new structure, special publicists are needed to deal with subordinate subjects under the major subject in bureaus within the major department, they could be so organized. The new advantage would be that their releases, and all others in the same general field, would be co-ordinated in the central departmental office which is concerned with one major subject.

2. *Short of ideal reorganization, as recommended, the President should stipulate regular meetings for the publicity agents dealing with kindred fields.*—Signs of this have appeared in the occasional, though not systematic, guidance offered the offices by the President's press secretary. He it was who set the tone of New Deal publicity as news and not ballyhoo. Some publicity agents also now attend the President's press conferences as a slight effort toward co-ordination. With some elaboration of systematic co-ordination, the publicity men for housing agencies, for conservation agencies, or for relief and welfare agencies might be gathered as units whose members would still be attached to separate agencies but whose purpose would be analyzed and accepted in informal loyalty to the President and a common objective and whose practices would be co-ordinated as suggested in the group consideration.

Any recommendation for change of this sort is immediately taken by alarmists to mean a central ministry of propaganda. A recommendation by the President's Committee for the establishment of a clearinghouse for "the correlation and coordination of the administrative policies of the several departments in the operation of their own informational services, and to perform related duties" raised a cry of protest in 1937. The statement read literally does not contemplate any change in the "operation of their own informational services" by "the

several departments," but the outcry was vehement nevertheless. The proposal for grouping publicity offices informally by subjects, even though they remained attached to existing agencies, probably would also provoke protest.<sup>43</sup>

It may be reported, as a matter of record, that in all the interviews connected with this study not one person advocated a central publicity office to initiate all publicity or to review all releases before they were issued by individual offices. The enormity of the job of reporting federal activities would be too great for any one office, and the danger of such concentrated power's falling into abusive censorial hands is too alarming for anyone who approves of the existing plan of government to propose such centralization. What is proposed here, in second choice to the reorganization of the whole administration as proposed by the Committee, is merely the establishment of communication among those publicity agents dealing with a common subject. This communication would be established through the leadership of the President's press secretary or some other person near the President. It would merely relate to an objective the loyalty which is now held for any President's program by its administrative officials. There would be no one central publicity bureau: there would be the present system of offices, but there would also be a grouping of agents dealing with related subjects in periodic meetings to plan their programs and to help each other in routine administration.

3. *The technical services involved in publicity should be co-ordinated wherever economy in money and procedure would be the result.*—The art of designing pictographs, publications, exhibits, or posters, and the arts of photography and film-making are not common to any person who decides to try them. The best skill in such techniques might be obtained by a central office paying enough to make the job attractive, while many publicity

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19; cf. also Arthur Krock, "Press vs. Government—a Warning," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 2 (April, 1937), 45-49; also Lawrence Sullivan, "Government by Mimeograph," *Atlantic Monthly*, CLXI, No. 3 (March, 1938), 306-15.

offices by themselves might not be able to hire such technicians. Arch A. Mercey, Assistant Director of the Information Division, Resettlement Administration, has proposed the centralization of technical services on the ground of getting more competent personnel and securing a uniform excellence for all graphic releases.<sup>44</sup> A central office would also carry the essential file of publicity photographs, motion pictures, graphic devices, and proofs of engravings to allow an official to choose what he wants, perhaps from a descriptive card index, without having to go to a number of files as at present. The major question in connection with centralization would be whether the best people were secured. A government movie can be dull, or it can be a persuasive work of art. A photograph can be a flat record with as much emotional content as a statistical table, or it can focus into one sharp poignant frame the human agony of a disordered economic system which demands federal relief. The difference comes from the approach and skill of the person behind the camera. As much can be said of other graphic media. If the central technical service is established, thorough and learned caution should be taken to get the right technicians in the service.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> "Modernizing Federal Publicity," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, I, No. 3 (July, 1937), 92.

<sup>45</sup> A step toward the co-ordination of motion-picture services was taken with the establishment, in September, 1938, of the United States Film Service as a division of the National Emergency Council. This agency has a fivefold task: (1) to distribute "The Plow That Broke the Plains" and "The River," the first two documentary films produced by government; (2) to provide a consultative service on motion pictures to government agencies, foundations, and schools; (3) to prepare visual education material on the use of the motion picture; (4) to produce films for interested agencies; and (5) to act as special adviser on government film policies. Within the first few months of its existence, the agency has served as the technical consultant to the Committee on Cooperation with the American Republics and has prepared a directory of federal films and a consolidated film chart to aid the users of films. Pare Lorentz, who directed the two documentary films for Resettlement Administration, is Director, and Arch A. Mercey, who was an executive and research member of the staff for the documentary films while Assistant Director of Information for Resettlement Administration, is Assistant Director of the new Film Service (letter, December 7, 1938).



Changes for co-ordination, either in the major degree of complete administrative reorganization or in the lesser, more subtle way of informal grouping to share information, would mean that a harmonious program could be offered and that the citizen could get quicker and clearer pictures of national administration. The co-ordination of technical services should raise the general quality of some releases for all offices.

## CHAPTER VII

### PERSONNEL

COMPARED to most federal activities, publicity employs few persons and thus is saved the typical personnel problems of the large group. As a staff function in which all employees shoulder responsibility, it does have, however, a problem of securing uniformity in competence and conception of the job and a problem of developing a desirable morale.

#### PRESENT CONDITIONS

Four types of people now work in the federal publicity offices. First, there are the successful publicists who entered government service in the exciting early days of the Franklin Roosevelt administration, when many thought the new day of peaceful revolution was breaking and the country was strongly behind a President who promised action. Many of these were newspapermen, some of whom left their newspaper jobs because they were weary of the routine and a few because they wanted to do something for the country.<sup>1</sup> Others were publicity chiefs for private and social enterprises. A few were connected with the movies and radio and, like many people in entertainment in those days, were out of work and glad to get government jobs. On the whole the competence of this general New Deal group among the Washington ranks had been proved by the jobs they had held in previous employment. To take a few outstanding examples, one had been managing editor of

<sup>1</sup> Generalizations concerning existing personnel are based on "off-the-record" data gathered in interviews. Some reference to the past experience of some of the outstanding government publicity men has been published in William E. Berchtold, "Press Agents of the New Deal," *New Outlook*, CLXIV, No. 1 (July, 1934), 23-30; and in Stanley High, "You Can't Beat the Government," *Saturday Evening Post*, CCX, No. 21 (November 20, 1937), 5-7, 34-38.

newspapers in Chicago and New York, and he gathered around him a Chicago city editor, a Washington managing editor, and several top men from the wire news services. Another, a newspaperman who had turned publicity man, had been directing publicity and education for the Welfare Council of New York City. Another had, after ten years on the desk of a Manhattan paper, gone to Albany as publicity director of the New York State Conservation Commission. Another had been in government publicity work during the Wilson administration and had then been press agent for a group of bankers before returning to government. Several had been Washington correspondents for metropolitan newspapers.

A second group comprises newspapermen who had served their time with the Democratic party and who were brought into administrative publicity with the Roosevelt victory. As would be expected, the principles of patronage operated here more than in any other group; and while a satisfactory run-of-the-mill job is done in most cases, little interest is shown by these men in the development of administrative publicity in a special significance. As usual, the very offices of this group, in comparison with those of other groups, show the difference in attitudes toward the job. In the first, a most amiable, well-fed, shrewd political outlook contrasts with, in the other, a somewhat terse, nervous struggle to accomplish a job that is always growing because people are always thinking of more and better things to do.

In a third type-group are the information writers and editors who antedate the New Deal and who usually spend as much or more of their time in what might be called "education" as in writing publicity that seeks an audience through the promotion of attention. In some cases, publicity that gets wide circulation is released by this permanent group of publicists, but the more common conception of administrative publicity among them is that of passive rather than aggressive publicity.

Finally, there are some Washington publicity men who see their jobs in the light of serving the public in a situation that

offers more opportunity for constructive social effectiveness than any other they can find. These men lack the cynicism of the hardboiled newspaperman but have his sophistication; they lack the political practice of the party publicist but they know the turns of administrative politics and can find their way around; they normally resent the limited definition of publicity which the "information clerk" is likely to give but they would include information and education in their expanded scope of publicity that informs, that teaches, and that persuades. With the first group—or men appointed for their competence and initiative—this fourth group provides a class of administrators who know their jobs, who have the insight and energy to do a constantly better job, who recognize the obligation to promote a program. The fourth group would go beyond the first in providing a social viewpoint that would make them the nucleus of a class of public administrators rather than merely competent administrators. More will be said later about publicity as a career service. For the present, it may be said that a beginning has been made toward finding men to form it.

Recruitment to these type-groups is no different in the publicity sphere than in many other parts of government. It involves, first, time-honored patronage employment, which usually gets more mediocre than superior officials; second, a large proportion of administrative appointments outside the merit system but based upon qualifications rather than on politics; and, third, recruitment within the merit system either through exemption from open competitive examination or through examination. The first method needs no comment: patronage appointments to administrative posts have been condemned so emphatically and continuously by students, citizens, and career administrators for so long that the method has few friends who are not ashamed to defend it openly. The second, recruitment by nonpolitical appointment, theoretically is true mainly for the temporary agencies, established in the emergency of the Great Depression. It may, however, be sig-

nificant as experience leading toward a permanent plan of recruitment to be discussed later. When such administrative appointments are made in agencies under Civil Service rules, as when the publicity man is designated an "expert" and relieved of facing competitive examination, they may come technically under the merit system, in the third type of recruitment. The merit appointment, more strictly defined when competitive examinations are given, will also be relevant to the later discussion and will not be described here.

Further, in a summary of present conditions there is the question of salary. Publicity men are well paid, as federal salaries go. The average annual salary for 212 specialists who spend all or part of their time issuing releases for the various media, and for whom the data is available, is \$3,974.<sup>2</sup> Forty-six per cent, or ninety-eight, of the group receive an annual salary of \$3,500 or more, the average for this class being \$5,390. In the lower salary bracket, below \$3,500 a year, the average is \$2,757.

In the fall of 1936 salaries of \$5,000 or more were being paid to forty-seven persons engaged wholly or partly in publicity work. The top salary was \$10,000 a year paid the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, who devoted all his time to publicity, but his pay was not much above the \$9,800 paid the Director of Information in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the \$8,500 paid the Director of Information in Farm Credit Administration, or the \$8,000 paid each to the chiefs of information offices in Public Works Administration, Social Security Board, Department of Agriculture, Federal Housing Administration, and Department of Justice.

<sup>2</sup> Figures on salaries are computed from U.S. Congress, Senate Committee To Investigate the Executive Agencies of the Government, *Report on the Government Activities on Library, Information, and Statistical Services*, No. 13, prepared by the Brookings Institution (75th Cong., 1st sess. [Senate Committee Print; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937]), p. 12 and Appendix. Salaries paid to clerks, stenographers, and messengers were excluded from my computation. In some cases annual salary rates were not reported to the Brookings Institution, hence the number of persons involved is less by eighteen specialists than the total number of persons engaged in publicity.

Information posts in the classified Civil Service, for which data could be gathered, are mainly in the Clerical, Administrative and Fiscal Service, with the exception of some positions as technical writers which are in the professional class.<sup>3</sup> Within the Clerical, Administrative and Fiscal category (commonly called C.A.F. in Civil Service usage), the head of informational or publicity activities of a department or bureau or the writers of original material on a wide variety of subject matter would be ranked in or above C.A.F. Grade 11. This grade, which would be a typical basic grade for publicity chiefs, carries a salary range from \$3,800 to \$4,600 a year. C.A.F. Grade 10, next below, with a salary range of \$3,500-\$4,100, is confined largely to editors of scientific and technical matter. Other technical writers, editors, and popularizers of scientific information are in C.A.F. 9 (\$3,200-\$3,800). A number of writers of general releases are in C.A.F. 8 (\$2,900-\$3,500). In general the average salary for classified informational positions in these typical grades appears to conform roughly to the average for all positions, classified and unclassified combined, in the whole of the federal government. There are, of course, top salaries above those in these grades, some in the emergency agencies outside the classified service, some in higher grades of the classified service, and some in excepted positions of the classified service.

This classification of informational positions recognizes that they require specialists. C.A.F. Grade 8 includes associate administrative duties requiring specialized training and experience, the use of independent judgment, and in some cases the supervision of a force in specialized work. Above this grade, the requirement of specialization, responsibility, and administrative ability are progressively increased. It may be said that in general the publicity official in the classified Civil Service is

<sup>3</sup> The grades and salaries in the federal classified service are found in U.S. Civil Service Commission, *Classification Statutes* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935). Information on the assignment of positions to grades was obtained from the files of the Commission (the situation was that of spring, 1936).

paid and ranked as an administrative officer who must exercise judgment, possess special skill plus initiative, and share the leadership of the organization.

The small size of the publicity organization and the fact that nearly every person is a specialist commanding a high wage account for the high average salary of the group.

Small size of the staff and the fact that most publicity agents are mature in experience when they enter government service means also that no training program within government has developed. A lack of thought for training indicates, of course, that publicity is not a permanent service in the sense of having young men from below learning to take the place of those who pass on. The future specialists are being trained outside of government so that the particular *esprit* of working in a tradition of public administration is not being encouraged, nor is a possible study being made of techniques which are especially useful to government publicists.<sup>4</sup>

All the phases of any personnel situation add up to the pervasive and all-important condition of morale. Now morale is not precisely defined. Generally it may be said that a condition of "good" morale is one in which a number of individuals, each enjoying relative ease in his own personal emotional life,

<sup>4</sup> The most promising training outside of government may prove the exception to this statement because it is conducted by federal publicity officials and is perhaps very similar to what might be taught within the service itself. It is the group of courses in publicity and reporting for government offered by American University in Washington and taught by government publicity officials. The announcement for the 1938 winter-spring term of the University's School of Public Affairs lists, under public administration, the following courses: "Applied Government Writing," taught by William Dow Boutwell, Editor, Office of Education, Director, Federal Radio Project; "Government Proofreading and Indexing," taught by Herbert Angel, Assistant to the Director of Publications, National Archives; "Government Documentary Films—Their Production and Use," taught by Arch A. Mercey, Assistant Director of Information, Farm Security Administration (formerly Resettlement Administration); "Contemporary Trends in Government Photography," taught by Roy Stryker, Chief, Historical Section, Division of Information, Farm Security Administration; and "Public Relations Workshop," conducted by William B. Phillips, Chief, Publications Section, Rural Electrification Administration.

are bound together happily in work for an understood purpose. "The individuals who make up a working department are not merely individuals; they constitute a group within which individuals have developed routines of relationships to each other, to their superiors, to their work, and to the policies of the company."<sup>5</sup> If these individuals are in tune with their own personal environment and in tune with other individuals in the group, all feeling valuable in effort for worthy aims, more will be accomplished by both individuals and group. "Morale is that attitude which results from the mobilizing of energy, interest, and initiative in the enthusiastic and effective pursuit of a group's purposes."<sup>6</sup>

The specific factors in good morale that are particularly applicable to publicity personnel, short of going much deeper into personality and other studies than is possible here, are obvious matters of salary, recognition, tenure, and the conditions affecting a common understanding among members of the group or preventing the individual from feeling that he is clearly identified as a needed member of the group.

Economic security has been fairly well established for the government publicity agent. His salary is high on the average; the hazards of sudden dismissal are much smaller than in private employment. He complains of red tape in much the same fashion as the person outside government, yet he finds his work interesting. None of the officials interviewed on this point expressed a strong desire to get out of government service into private publicity work, while several thought that government publicity offered more interesting work than private. The question of promotions, which is so important in larger organizations, is not a major problem in publicity staffs where most members are already holding executive positions. Salary

<sup>5</sup> Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 116 (chap. v of this work is on "The Meaning of Morale").

<sup>6</sup> Ordway Tead, *Human Nature and Management* (2d ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1933), p. 173.



increases can satisfy ambition in most cases. On the whole the present conditions of income and security in federal publicity offices are friendly to the development of a tradition of loyalty and hence good morale.

The chief hindrance to good morale lies in the insecurity of the publicity function itself and in the practitioner's unsatisfied claim for personal deference. Attacks on government publicity were reviewed in chapter i and need not be repeated here. Translated into terms of the individual, this surrounding hostility is an ever present threat which injects a consideration of defense against attack into every decision the administrator makes. This is the fate in part of all administrators, of course, in a representative system of government, but it is especially acute with publicity agents who have been isolated for special attack.

Added to this universal insecurity of his function is the uncertain position of the publicity man within his agency. He is close to the chief executive and gets a personal satisfaction from "being on the inside," but his role is not thoroughly accepted by many technicians and other line officials. The conflicts in co-ordination, discussed in chapter vi, often force the publicity official to persuade and cajole his fellow-executives in other divisions.<sup>7</sup>

Publicity men, furthermore, seldom get the satisfaction of appearing in the forefront; they get no deference from an audience; they are never quoted as the source of news; yet they know they are responsible for getting the audience together, for writing the speech which the audience hears from the line official who speaks, and for putting news into the mouth of a chief executive who is quoted. They know their importance as well when, in the customary way, the chief executives come to believe that they themselves are the actual source of the wisdom given them in many cases by press agents. It is difficult to maintain a sense of personal prestige when all public credit goes to the front man. The most common adjustment ap-

<sup>7</sup> See pp. 175-83.

parently is an amused disdain for "stuffed shirts"—an attitude quite common among publicity men in Washington and elsewhere.

The publicity man has, too, his own problems of personal public relations in maintaining the respect of those who control the free outlets to the public. He must get along well with newspapermen, radio, and motion-picture agents. To do this, he assumes a dignified equality which is useful as a technique of maintaining prestige with these outside agents (no competent publicity agent would ever think of begging for space), but which fails really to hide the fact that propagandists are dependent on the persons who control access to media. He suffers in prestige with these persons because he has deserted the so-called freedom of the reporter and attached himself to the source of news as a paid apologist.<sup>8</sup> He gains prestige in his own eyes by denying that reporters are free; by enjoying the perquisites of salary, a private office, secretaries for the routine detail, and other emoluments which only a few reporters ever attain; and by knowing that he is behind most of the news in the media. Whether the balance is for or against his sense of prestige, he still has to face the questioning of reporters and, in many cases, a sense of having forsaken his past loyalties.<sup>9</sup>

The conditions of economic security and interesting work which favor good morale are outweighed by the hostility to publicity, by the lack of clear articulation and understanding between publicity agents and other officials within the agency, and by the personal situation of the publicity agent which denies him public acclaim and removes him from his past loyalties of working for media instead of for news sources. Future concern, then, in the administration of publicity should

<sup>8</sup> The "freedom" of reporters is, of course, largely fictitious (see Leo C. Rosten, *The Washington Correspondents* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937], chap. x).

<sup>9</sup> The personality traits and the attitudes of propagandists are discussed in Harold D. Lasswell, "The Person: Subject and Object of Propaganda," *Annals*, CLXXIX (May, 1935), 187.

be directed toward developing a standard of high professional morale. Some of the possibilities will be considered next.

#### A PERSONNEL PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE

The only hope for securing an ideal state of morale in the public service lies in expanding the present traditions, found in some agencies, to permeate all agencies and in creating the environment in which every man in the administration will feel that his personal aims are best served by serving the interests of the group. Such a feat of psychic regeneration would be achieved only through co-ordination around a recognized common purpose, which was discussed in the preceding chapter, and in the creation of a true and universal professional career service based on true and unqualified merit.

In the case of publicity men, a career service would mean that publicity would have to be recognized as a legitimate staff function by Congress, by the public, and by the other officials in all administrative agencies. No healthy career service can live when men have to watch their every move to protect themselves against attack. A career service would also mean that recruitment procedure would find, allowing for normal error, only those persons qualified to do a superior job of publicity over a career span of employment. Political appointees, enlisted only for patronage, would be denied all access to the administrative publicity offices. Competence alone would be the criterion for recruiting administrative publicity officials.

Most publicity agents in Washington are agreed, in interviews, on the type of person best qualified for their work. He must have the usual attributes of intelligence, initiative, moral strength, and amiable personality polished off with an interest in socioeconomic problems and a background of general education. Beyond these he must have those special personal traits that mark the artist from the pedant, the political leader from the plebeian voter, the successful salesman from the routine clerk. Of him it must be said, in that meaningful but unprecise expression, "He has a spark." If this trait is refined into com-

ponents, it means that the publicity man has been through a life-experience which makes him sensitive to other persons, which makes him curious about a great variety of things, and which makes him place importance on the daily event but allows him, as well, to see events in series and in relation to each other. He will know the language of the crowd and will think in terms of common attitudes; he will avoid "high-brow" preoccupation and shun the jargon of academicians. He will rely on intuition in analyzing his audience, and he fails if his intuition is too often inaccurate.

He will take pride and pleasure in being conversant with many kinds of specialized words and events but will not become profound in any. His job requires such versatility. He must be able to talk with reporters for a technical magazine or for a sensational newspaper; he must write releases for a special group and for the heterogeneous capacities of the radio audience; he must know his way among the stereotypes of political rights and lefts and middleways. In preparing for this acquaintance with many facets of the vocabularies in communication, he follows a myriad of current events dissociated in time. It is inconceivable that a historian with only the long view could endure a news ticker in his office and a messenger arriving every half-hour with the latest tape or the last newspaper edition to reach the street. The publicity man is one with the reporter in living perpetually and somewhat frantically with the daily event.<sup>10</sup> He, like the reporter, deals in the daily event. But the publicity man must also utilize his growing observations in occasional dramatic summaries of some condition, in addition to using particular events as fodder for particular audiences. He must be able to compose an essay, in prose or by camera, which uses an accumulation of facts. In this respect he must add interpretation to his concern for the immediate event, though he still may shun the historical long view.

If fate has chosen him to enjoy a combination of insight,

<sup>10</sup> Washington newspapermen in their reading and talking are interested primarily in news (Rosten, *op. cit.*, chap. vii).

intuition, curiosity, versatility, sensitiveness, and the ability to make a pattern of daily events, the applicant has the spark and is, publicity men agree, a good recruit for the service.

No such agreement exists among the present publicity men on whether experience with media is essential. Some when interviewed placed experience on newspapers alongside "spark" as a necessary qualification. It was the only way men could learn news value, they said, and the only way to get acquainted with newspapermen. Others went so far in the opposite belief as to say that experience might be harmful by creating too rigid ideas about style of writing and through placing too much emphasis on the one medium in which the experience had been gained. Flexibility in techniques cannot be regained when once destroyed, they said, and a comprehensive grasp of publicity in relation to all media is more valuable than experience with any one medium. A good documentary motion picture, say these dissenters, would not be directed as well by a person trained in Hollywood's studios as by a person fresh to the medium but with a broad and adventurous conception of camera reporting. The chief of an outstanding photography office says that he has never found a photographer trained in newspaper camera work who could grasp the conception of documentary or informative photography that stands out for its own quality. He built his staff largely from amateur ranks and from artists who had dropped painting for the camera.

No dogmatic generalization about experience as a qualification for entry should be made. The personal traits are in any case more important. If the man with the personal qualifications has had experience with media, well and good, but the qualified person without experience should not be excluded. Nor should any dogmatic scheme of recruitment at any age level be accepted. Some good publicity men will enter the service while young and work up through in-service experience, while others will apply after perhaps years of experience with media outside government. If a sufficient nucleus of permanent career officials is maintained to set the tone of the service, some

mature persons from outside may be admitted with benefit to the service. The trait to look for always is the desirable personal motivation and orientation with respect to news and its compelling presentation to audiences.

The Civil Service Commission has proceeded on the contrary theory, i.e., that requiring a college education, with major study in a relevant field; plus experience in newspaper, magazine, or publicity work, sometimes in a special subject; and requiring samples of writing done by the applicant would secure the best-qualified information personnel. When education-and-experience as a unit is not given the same weight as the sample of writing, the former is given heavier weight. This scheme, which has held true for at least ten years, was varied slightly in 1937 to provide a four-hour test of writing ability instead of asking only for samples of written work, though a list of publications was still requested.<sup>11</sup>

A good many publicity men condemn the Civil Service type of examination for overlooking personal factors. They insist that an applicant's ability to see news, to inject an imaginative flair into a release, to see possibilities for the use of media, to combine these with administrative skill, and, above all, his ability to get along with people both inside and outside his office are much more important than his years of experience or his samples of writing. They recite instances when a good man would be unable to pass the examination because he lacked the special experience demanded, and they say the Civil Service

<sup>11</sup> Announcements of examinations for Assistant in Agricultural Information (No. 132, Unassembled, April 13, 1927, and No. 129, Unassembled, May 4, 1929); for Associate in Public Information, Children's Bureau (No. 104, Unassembled, May 9, 1931); for Associate Special Writer, Associate Special Writer and Exhibits Designer, Assistant Special Writer, and Assistant Special Writer and Exhibits Designer, Children's Bureau (No. 111, Unassembled, October 14, 1935); for Principal Agricultural Research Writer, Special Agricultural Research Writer, Agricultural Research Writer, and Agricultural Research Writer, Radio, Department of Agriculture (No. 22, Unassembled, February 24, 1936); for Senior Informational Service Representative, Informational Service Representative, Associate Informational Service Representative, and Assistant Informational Service Representative, Social Security Board (No. 9, Assembled, December 21, 1936).

eligible lists for publicity posts are full of uninspired journalists unqualified for the type of work required. They complain that Civil Service examiners are not acquainted with the true role of administrative publicity as a way of discerning or making news and reporting it effectively. Regardless of a law to discourage the employment of a "publicity expert" and the solemn austerity of the titles given publicity experts as a result, the job, they say, involves much more than the accurate translation of scientific research data into popular language, yet the present type of examination stresses this type of accuracy.

If a career service is to be built, and through it a condition of good morale, some recognized and respected form of standard recruiting procedure is essential. It must secure the type of person considered by the approved present corps and by logical observation to be best suited for the job as it actually exists. In this light, the present examining system appears inadequate, and a substitute designed to encourage confidence will have to be found.

The publicity office is already established by salary level and responsibility in the top rank of the federal administrative hierarchy. It demands in its personnel, to summarize, qualities of administrative skill, breadth of vision in conceiving a program, perspective on the role of publicity in relation to other activities in the agency, and, of great importance, the imagination to dramatize releases so they will be heeded, and the personal traits that go with being aware of the audience. These are the foremost qualifications demanded. In addition the office requires a knowledge of the techniques of propaganda, including enough acquaintance with the graphic media to enable the administrator to criticize the technicians who produce the actual film or poster or pictograph. The desirable Civil Service examination would reveal both the personal qualities and the technical knowledge, stressing the first more than the second. It would locate the best equipped personnel either

inside the office, for promotion, or outside the office, for recruitment.

General intelligence and breadth of information could be ascertained by an examination. So too the possession of the necessary amount of technical skill in writing and acquaintance with the techniques of publicity could be discovered by examination. Beyond these qualities the recruiting procedure should abandon examinations (for no tests exist now to prove temperamental qualities)<sup>12</sup> and should explore the personality of the applicant through oral investigation. He should be interviewed by competent publicity men already in the service and by line officials who will work with him; persons who have worked with him in the past should be interviewed when they are capable of giving objective judgment; an impartial observer from outside the agency, preferably a representative of the Civil Service Commission who has skill in the casual analysis of personality should have a part; and the views of agents representing the media should be gathered as far as possible, since the successful candidate will have to get on well with these agents.<sup>13</sup>

This is a more time-consuming method of recruitment than

<sup>12</sup> Commission of Inquiry on Public Service Personnel, *Minutes of Evidence* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1935), pp. 235-39 (testimony of Professor Louis L. Thurstone, cited in Marshall E. Dimock, *Modern Politics and Administration* [New York: American Book Co., 1937], pp. 300-301).

<sup>13</sup> The President's Committee on Administrative Management suggests the Committee Plan, now used tentatively by the Civil Service Commission, as the way to recruit for all high, nonpolitical administrative positions. The recruiting committee is composed of representatives of the agency and the Civil Service Commission and conferees from other agencies or from outside government. It decides what qualifications are required of candidates and rates the applicants either from submitted evidence or from this plus interviews. An oral examination is favored by the Committee for all high-ranking applicants for high administrative posts (President's Committee on Administrative Management, *Report with Special Studies* [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937], pp. 122-24). Leonard D. White recommends a general intelligence test and a test of knowledge of and capacity to handle the special subject matter of the position for applicants to the career service (*Government Career Service* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935], pp. 41-42).



impersonal examination, but at most only about two hundred jobs are involved. The publicity office probably will always remain small in size. Recruitment for it is not a matter of filling hundreds of posts but a simpler task of selecting only a few men each year.

After recruitment, the career publicity man should be submitted to the test of a probationary period long enough to prove his worth and should be scrutinized at intervals to measure his rate of growth in maturity and skill. This recommended procedure would not be unique to publicity but would be general throughout an ideal administrative career service. Serious consideration should be given as well to granting periodic leaves to publicity officials, as to other high administrative officials. The publicity man deals with the representatives of media and with the public most concerned with the work of his agency. He should be able to get in close touch with these groups on leaves from his routine duties. While experience with media may not be a prerequisite to entrance to government publicity service, it might be desirable as a later stage of training for which leaves would be suitable.<sup>14</sup>

A career service, finally, when defined generally implies the separation of administrative and political publicity so that the permanent publicity official may concentrate on publicizing the program, the objectives, the successes of administration while the publicity office for the party handles the praise and defense of politicians. The difficulty, however, with this definition for a universal career service is that it does not fit the conditions of publicity work. Earlier in these pages the predicament of an administrative publicity office when its agency is politically attacked was cited (chap. ii). The publicity man must prepare the public for the operations of his agency, and he must fight political propaganda with his own brand when the public is being misled, as he defines misleading. The publicity man also represents the political head of his agency by

<sup>14</sup> White, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50, 64-65.

name to the public, since media demand releases that cite a person as the source and in approved administration the political head makes the public appearances while the permanent official remains in the background. If co-ordination through a sense of common purpose is to be achieved throughout the agencies handling similar subjects, informal union in loyalty to the President's program seems the most feasible immediate way. While this involvement in political realms is not tied directly to party propaganda, it denies the strict removal of the administrative publicist from the party obligations of his political chief.

The doctrine accepted by students of public administration to cover the relation of a career man to politics provides that the permanent official submit to the program of the political party and lend every aid in promoting it through his knowledge of administrative matters.<sup>15</sup> This doctrine of loyalty to the program and of aid with technical means becomes especially significant in the relation of the permanent publicity official to the political leadership both of his agency and of the government as a whole. He must not only advise the political chief on problems of administration; he must also represent the political chief and his program to the public and must co-ordinate his efforts with those of publicity officials in other agencies committed to a common program. He must act with such loyalty that his political chief will have as much confidence in him as in a personally appointed subordinate. Enough evidence has already been accumulated to show that this type of relationship is possible; publicity men without political affiliations are now serving in this dual loyalty to administrative integrity and to the political obligations of their superiors. A nucleus of professional government publicity agents who aid the political program without sacrificing their devotion to good administration has been established. The men who tell audiences about Soil Conservation Service, Resettlement Administration, Social

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. v.

Security Board, Farm Credit Administration, and some other agencies could continue in the administrative phases of their work with only very slight change under a different political leadership. At the same time, they could accept whatever change of political objective might be introduced by the new party. They could provide administrative continuity and skill while being loyal to the program which Congress, the elected executive, and the party prescribe in their role of representing popular will.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

**T**HIS study has so far covered descriptively the kinds of publicity, the techniques of federal publicity offices, and some of the problems raised by their organization and staffing. In chapters ii-v, the practices of the offices in planning their programs, using media, distributing releases, and measuring results were considered. In chapters vi and vii the organization and co-ordination of the offices in the federal administration and the conditions of personnel were discussed. It is now time to select some of the more pertinent descriptive material and assemble it in terms of the whole. This chapter will be devoted to some conclusions on the extent of variety in publicity practice, on choice of media, on the publicity program, and on administrative problems. The final chapter will relate the practice of publicity by government to the current and possible future trends in democracy.

#### RECENT CONDITIONS AND THE EXTENT OF FEDERAL PUBLICITY PRACTICE

In drawing conclusions, a most striking fact is the prominence of the newer federal agencies in the more elaborate planning of publicity programs and the more extensive use of media. Among types of program, three were suggested in the questionnaire: (1) campaigns on single topics; (2) stress on a central theme for a period without specific campaigns; and (3) taking the news breaks as they come, without plotting a sequential program. The federal officials designated one or more of these program types as they were followed. Among the uses of media, wide variety of release is possible, and the officials were asked to designate the types of release which their offices pre-

pared for the newspaper, radio, and the miscellaneous media (film-strips, exhibits, and posters). Thus newspaper releases might include one or more of the following: spot-news releases, feature stories, spot-news pictures, feature or documentary pictures, cartoons, cartoon mats, maps, or map mats. Radio releases might be script for addresses, script for studio dramas, script for studio interviews, script for news broadcasts, or electrical transcriptions (disks) of drama. Film-strips, exhibits, and posters may be grouped as miscellaneous media for economy of space, and the extent of their use may be indicated by whether or not an office prepares one or more of these three types of release. Information was also gathered concerning types of release in government motion pictures, magazines, and publicity pamphlets, but the variety of practice was not sufficient to justify comparison.

In the discussions of distribution and measurement (see chaps. iv and v) it became evident that clear-cut conclusions as to the amount of effective publicity reaching audiences of determinable sizes are impossible. Even records of the total amount of publicity released are insufficient to make comparisons of annual and monthly volumes within an agency or between agencies. Another way of arranging the data might afford more information as to the degree in which the different agencies use the varied resources of publicity. Thus it may be said that an office engages more than average in publicity if it follows two or more of the three possible types of campaign; if it prepares three or more of the eight possible types of releases for newspapers; three or more of the five possible types of releases for the radio; or if it uses two or more of the three miscellaneous media, exhibits, film-strips, and posters. The proportion of use required for a rating of above average is determined by the average practice, as shown by the replies.

If space allowed, we might lay out charts to show the practice of each federal publicity office in the type of program followed and in the variety of releases to newspaper, to radio, and

to miscellaneous media. Placed side by side the charts would show the average practice in each category and also those offices which engage in a greater-than-average variety of practice. This procedure was followed in the present instance, though the charts of work sheets are not published in evidence.

As an example of more than average variety, Resettlement Administration (later called Farm Security Administration) appears in the work-sheet charts as following all three types of program, as preparing six out of eight possible types of releases to newspapers and four out of five possible types of releases to the radio, and as using all three of the miscellaneous media, film-strips, exhibits, and posters. At the other extreme, the Federal Trade Commission, e.g., follows only one of the three possible types of programs (i.e., the release only of news as it breaks); prepares only one of the eight possible types of releases to newspapers and none of the five possible types of releases to radio; and uses none of the three miscellaneous media. The four fields of activity—i.e., (1) types of programs, (2) types of release to newspaper, (3) types of release to radio, and (4) use of film-strips, exhibits, and posters—may be called “categories of practice.” Then when each agency is found in a sum of its practice to be above or below average in extent of publicity effort, it may be classified accordingly. The most prominent agencies in the class of those most extensively engaged in campaigns and preparation of varied types of releases to newspaper, radio, and miscellaneous media are:

Agricultural Adjustment Administration	Radio Project, Office of Education
Department of Agriculture, General Office	Resettlement Administration
Farm Credit Administration	Rural Electrification Administration
Federal Housing Administration	Works Progress Administration

These are found in three or more of the four categories of practice as engaging above average in variety of publicity effort.

Next to this group are those agencies which are found in two or more of the categories of practice as engaging more

than average in variety of campaign and use of media. They are:

Bureau of Public Roads	Department of the Interior, General Office
Emergency Conservation Work	
Forest Service	Public Works Administration
National Bituminous Coal Commission	Soil Conservation Service
	Social Security Board

In the middle area are a few offices which are found only once in four possible categories above average for one type of practice but which could hardly be called outstanding. They are:

Bureau of Mines	National Youth Administration
Bureau of Standards	Public Works Administration, Housing Division
Federal Home Loan Bank Board	
Food and Drug Administration	U.S. Maritime Commission
National Park Service	U.S. Public Health Service

More revealing is the list of offices that are not found in any category of practice for outstanding scope of campaign or use of media. It follows:

Department of Commerce	Navy Department
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	Reconstruction Finance Corporation
Federal Power Commission	Securities and Exchange Commission
Federal Reserve Board	
Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation	Smithsonian Institution
Federal Trade Commission	State Department
Interstate Commerce Commission	Treasury Department
Department of Justice	U.S. Civil Service Commission
National Labor Relations Board	U.S. Tariff Commission
	War Department

The significance of these lists lies in the fact that of the first, i.e., those agencies appearing as above average in three or more of the four possible categories, only one, the Department of Agriculture, was established prior to the depression beginning in 1929. The other seven are new agencies. In the next list, those found in two or more categories, five of the eight agencies are new since the depression. In the middle-area list, of those appearing in one category out of four, four out of nine are new

since the depression began. As a contrast to this prevalence of the newer agencies among those making extensive use of publicity is the preponderance of predepression agencies in the list of those which were not found in any practice as above average in the scope of program and use of media. Of the eighteen average-or-below agencies, thirteen (72 per cent) are predepression and five are new.

Again, this grouping indicates only the extent of varied publicity activity and not the quantitative amount of publicity issued or received. Some of the predepression agencies are very prominent for space received in the newspaper and magazine. The Department of Commerce, Federal Reserve Board, Interstate Commerce Commission, and Treasury Department, all predepression agencies, are among the most prominent for receiving newspaper space as shown by an analysis of 1,281 items of federal administrative news in the *New York Times* in the spring and summer of 1937 (Table 1); while among agencies prominent for number of magazine references as shown by an analysis of titles concerning administrative agencies in *Reader's Guide* for eleven months (Table 2), the predepression agencies slightly outnumber the new. Not the amount of publicity but the variety of effort to get publicity is involved here.

Although in the total of all agencies for which information was gathered, the old and new agencies are equally represented, twenty-two old and twenty-two new, the new agencies appear more than twice as often for using the most varied publicity methods. The relationship is shown in Table 6, in which the agencies have been separated into categories of predepression, recovery, and new-permanent. The recovery agencies are those established as emergency instruments to administer relief and to stimulate recovery. New-permanent agencies are those established under legislation adopted during the depression but not considered temporary. The latter two constitute new agencies.

Figures on the size of publicity staff employed in 1936 when the Brookings study was made also verify this conclusion that



the new agencies are the ones most widely practicing publicity efforts.<sup>1</sup> Of the ten offices employing five or more specialists full time, six are new agencies. In terms of the total number of full-time specialists employed (see chap. vi, pp. 167-68), the new far outweigh the older agencies. The four older agencies employ a total of twenty-one full-time specialists, or an average

TABLE 6  
RELATION OF OLD AND NEW AGENCIES IN OUTSTANDING  
EXTENT OF PROGRAM AND USE OF MEDIA

	Follow Two or More Campaign Plans	Three or More Types of Releases to Newspapers	Three or More Types of Releases to Radio	Use Two out of Three Miscellaneous Media
Predepression agencies	2	7	2	4
Recovery agencies . . .	2	6	2	6
New-permanent agen- cies . . . . .	4	4	5	7
Total new agen- cies . . . . .	6	10	7	13

NOTE.—Predepression agencies are those which were in operation in their present form before 1929.

Recovery agencies are those said to be temporary for the duration of the depression emergency. New-permanent agencies were established during the depression but under legislation of a permanent type.

Predepression and new agencies are equally represented in the total number of forty-four agencies from which information was received.

of 5.25, while the six new agencies employ a total of ninety-four, or an average of 15.6 each.

The mere increase in the number of agencies after the depression would produce an increased volume of publicity output from Washington in recent years. What is involved here in

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate Committee To Investigate the Executive Agencies of Government, *Report on Government Activities on Library Information, and Statistical Services*, prepared by the Brookings Institution (75th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Committee Print [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937]); and for Works Progress Administration, U.S. Congress, House, *First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937, Hearings before the Sub-committee of the Committee on Appropriations, in Charge of Deficiency Appropriations* (75th Cong. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937]), p. 150, and personal interview, February 8, 1937.

an analysis of practice rather than of volume is a more extensive publicity effort in recent years, due no doubt to the novelty of the post-depression enterprises undertaken by government.<sup>2</sup>

A near-collapse of the economic system, the near-panic attending widespread bank failures, an enormous and precipitous increase in the number of unemployed, the adoption by the successful Democratic party in 1933 of a general policy of setting up protective barriers against a repetition of the drastic decline in prices, production, and security of savings—all these and other events added to the work of government. The famous alphabetical expansion was rapid and wide, beginning with the R.F.C. under the Republicans and reaching a zenith under the Democrats whose W.P.A., P.W.A., R.E.A., and some twenty other combinations of initials became part of the language and a constant confusion to the citizen. This expansion brought an attendant need for more explanation of the program and more attention to the possible public reaction to administrative practices. Likewise, as more of the public became involved in any way with the new program, more demands for information were created. If farm and housing loans were offered, citizens wanted to know where to get them. Applicants for relief had to be told about eligibility and plans. Business wanted to know about public works and fiscal policies. Farmers asked about adjustment plans and rehabilitation.

The novelty of the enterprise was linked in administration with the novelty of the response desired from the public. For one thing, government needed acceptance by the public of the expanded role of government, especially in the new fields entered by the federal government. In earlier days relief of the destitute had been the concern of private charity or local government. Now administrators of a huge federal relief program

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Harold D. Lasswell, "The Scope of Research on Propaganda and Dictatorship," in Harwood Lawrence Childs (ed.), *Propaganda and Dictatorship* (Princeton University Press, 1936). The volume of propaganda, says Lasswell, increases as a result of factors which include the number and novelty of acts performed in the community. The findings presented in this chapter may be said to verify this hypothesis for the area which they covered.

needed public recognition of the necessity for a large-scale solution; needed public acceptance of the costly moral purpose behind systematic nation-wide relief, for now taxpayers were to pay the bill in contrast to the previous voluntary contributions to charities; needed favorable attitudes among private employers toward relief clients so that re-employment, if it came, would reduce the relief rolls; needed a sustained morale among relief clients to fulfil the purpose of preventing "human erosion." These were needs for new responses arising from new enterprises assumed by the federal government. In a similar way, the innovation in old age insurance administration by the federal government brought needs for new public responses.

Another significant new response made desirable by the new enterprises was the shift of loyalty from private to public authority and decision. This shift had been gradually taking place for some time in the slow process of history, but it was accelerated and made more prominent by the depression and the "New Deal."

Bankers were prominent among the scapegoats of the recovery era.<sup>3</sup> Symbols like "money-changers," "intrenched greed," "economic royalists," or "the forgotten man" became common in the addresses of the President and other federal officials. Private authority was suspected of having failed to spread the benefits. The promise of a better life for all as a result of governmental action drew citizens in large numbers to the ranks of those whose loyalty had been transferred to public rather than private agencies. Federal publicity among clients of government and among the more remote public groups was an instrument in the acceleration of this process. Publicity men wrote most of the speeches and issued most of the news of federal activities which drew the support. They explained the novel enterprises and incidentally worked for the desired shift of public affection and support from private to public authority.

<sup>3</sup> Gurden Edwards, "Banking and Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly* I, No. 2 (April, 1937), 5-26.

A third response needed by government was consumer response. It was one thing to adopt legislation to provide service and another thing to establish connection with the individual consumers who needed the services. Federal publicity offices in many cases had to reach consumers with information on the services made available.

Farmers now learned, through government publicity, that the federal funds available to farmers were enlarged and under new rules. In cases of destitution, those who were eligible could gain at least temporary release by getting rehabilitation loans from government. Did farmers want electricity for their farms? They should form an association and borrow money from government.

The novelty of public enterprises in the years of the great depression and the novelty of the response necessary for the execution of recovery and reform programs was true for the fields of relief, public works, a new emphasis on conservation and recreation, and the increased business in loans, subsidies, and insurance. In the fields where emphasis had been more pronounced before the depression, notably in the old-line functions such as some of those performed by the Departments of Justice, Navy, State, and War, novelty of enterprise and novelty of desired response was lacking.

The connection between the new emphasis in government enterprises during the recovery period and the extensive practice of publicity can be demonstrated in Table 7. For this table the agencies represented in the same four categories of practice that were used for the preceding table were classified according to their major function. This is a loose way of categorizing federal agencies, since many perform varied and unrelated functions, but it is sufficiently precise to illustrate the difference in the promotion of publicity. The predominant function of the agency is taken as the significant one in assigning to a category.

Functions performed by the agencies which appeared as indulging most extensively in publicity are, in descending order of their frequency of appearance in the categories of practice:

(1) the making of loans, subsidies, or the administration of insurance schemes; (2) research and reporting of factual information; (3) conservation and recreation; (4) dispensing relief; (5) building public works; (6) regulation, as performed by the independent commissions; (7) "old-line" administration by long-established agencies. Among these, all save the old-line functions have been given new emphasis during the depression years, as indicated by their expansion of function or creation of new agencies.

TABLE 7

TYPES OF FUNCTION REPRESENTED IN OUTSTANDING EXTENT  
OF PUBLICITY PROGRAM AND USE OF MEDIA

Function	Follow Two or More Cam- paign Plans	Three or More Types of Re- leases to News- papers	Three or More Types of Re- leases to Radio	Use Two out of Three Miscel- laneous Media	Total Appear- ances	Number of Agencies Repre- sented
Loans, subsidies, and insur- ance.....	3	3	5	6	17	10
Research and reporting....	1	4	3	1	9	7
Conservation and recreation	1	4	.....	3	8	4
Relief.....	2	3	2	1	8	5
Public works.....	.....	2	.....	3	5	3
Regulation.....	1	2	.....	.....	3	7
Old-line function.....	.....	.....	.....	1	1	7

A further point should be made regarding the increase in the range of publicity activity during the depression. The introduction of expanded and novel enterprises was accompanied by a large increase in the amount of federal expenditures, and part of this new spending found its way into publicity. The large appropriations for public works and relief and the new money directed into loans and subsidies meant enlarged funds for the administration (and publicizing) of these activities. Publicity offices for the newer agencies and functions had the money to practice publicity in a larger scope. In addition, they enjoyed more freedom in the use of money than did the older

agencies. Some of the total for new activities was appropriated in a lump sum which the President could distribute in his own discretion for administrative purposes. The items for publicity did not have to endure the hostility that might have been raised in an itemized appropriation nor did the traditional restrictions on the style of printing and the objectives of publicity apply to the new offices.

Inseparably connected with this expansion of publicity usage and the enlarged spending is the fact that new agencies had the services of new publicity personnel as well as more specialists to perform the job. Many of these men were fresh to the public service and were uninhibited by traditional definitions and methods of government publicity. Thus new ideas and fresh perspective were brought to the job of publicizing agencies and enterprises that were new to government.

Finally, it should be said again for emphasis that while the data indicate that agencies for new enterprises engage in more extensive publicity practices, nothing has been cited to show that the older agencies do not receive as much publicity. Some of the older agencies, as mentioned before, notably the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and Treasury, and the Federal Reserve Board enjoy abundant attention in the public media, but, with the exception of Agriculture, they do not work for it in as great variety of effort as do the new agencies. They merely provide the aid requested by media and prepare one or a few types of releases.

One other suggestion arises, though dimly, from a review of the descriptive data, and—short of the more adequate research needed for confirmation—it can only be mentioned here as a possible truth. It is that publicity activity increases with the amount of hostility to the agency. The amount of obvious defense against attack is very slight in the content of federal publicity, as found in chapter iii, but the dissemination of counterpublicity, without reference to an attack, is one of the objectives of the offices examined, as reported in chapter ii. Social Security Board was cited as having tried to fight

"dirty politics with administrative purity" by answering mis-statements with facts. Figures on the increase of expenditures for publicity during election year and the testimony of the Administrator before an appropriation committee were given to show that Works Progress Administration defended itself against attack. Both these agencies were under fire from the Republican party in the campaign of 1936. The experience of two agencies is slight evidence to prove a thesis. It indicates only that one possibility worth considering is that new enterprises by government arouse new hostilities and that counter-publicity will account for some of the increased variety of publicity activity in the newer agencies.

#### THE USE OF MEDIA

In addition to showing the relative variety of publicity practices, the material in chapter iii also reveals that federal publicity offices distribute their releases predominantly to the three privately owned media of mass circulation (i.e., newspapers, magazines, and radio) rather than through their own controlled media (i.e., pamphlets, exhibits, own movies, posters, and film-strips).<sup>4</sup> When the agencies are combined and the distribution of the major type of release to each medium is taken as the indication of use, the rank shown in Table 8 is found.

Since the use of media is predominantly a use of newspapers, magazines, and radio, attention may be directed to some of the relevant comparisons of them. A first important concern is the type of subject content found. The federal offices, when examined compositely, stress three types of content in their releases, and other types are relatively incidental in the total output. These three main categories involve (1) releases announcing the achievements, progress, and policy of the agency; (2) releases describing the methods of work, the nature of the function performed, or the equipment of the agency; and (3) releases presenting facts from records or research in the

<sup>4</sup> Daily or weekly radio feature programs by government are not included in this analysis. All reference to radio is limited to the miscellaneous broadcast.

agency's function. The comparative proportion of these types of subject content in the total content of government publicity in the media is shown in Table 9.

TABLE 8  
RANKING OF MEDIA USED BY FEDERAL PUBLICITY OFFICES  
AS INDICATED BY PREPARATION OF MOST COMMON  
TYPE OF RELEASE FOR EACH MEDIUM

Medium	Number of Offices Using Medium	Per Cent of Total Offices Represented
1. Newspapers.....	44	100
2. Magazines.....	31	70
3. Radio.....	27	61
4. Pamphlets.....	24	55
5. Own movies.....	18	41
6. Posters.....	12	27
7. Film-strips.....	9	20

TABLE 9  
RELATIVE SUBJECT CONTENT IN THE THREE  
MEDIA OF MAJOR USE

Subject	Per Cent of Total Federal Content in Newspapers	Per Cent of Total Federal Content in Magazines	Per Cent of Total Federal Content in Radio Mis- cellaneous Programs
Achievement, progress, policy of the agency.....	22	44	28
Work, nature, equipment of the agency.....	8	32	17
Facts from records and research....	22	.....	10
Total, major types of content..	52	76	55
All other types of content.....	48	24	45
Grand total.....	100	100	100

One conclusion apparent in this table is that news of achievement, progress, and policy is used in greater proportion in all three media than is subject matter of other categories, with the exception of factual content in newspapers. In magazines especially, news of policy finds large space. Releases describing the



work, nature of function, or equipment of an agency are not as much used in the newspaper as in the other two media and, in fact, find relatively insignificant space in the daily paper. The best outlet for information of this category appears to be the magazine. On the other hand, the releases dealing with facts from records and research by government find a considerable space in the newspaper but none in the magazines and an insignificant use in miscellaneous radio broadcasts. Another comparison that may be extracted from this table and from the source tables in chapter iii is that the newspaper and radio offer a broader field of possible usage outside of these three major categories of subject content than does the magazine. While the three major types together constitute roughly half of all the federal content in the newspaper and radio, they account for three-fourths of the total federal content in the magazine. A reference back to the source tables would show that eleven categories of federal subject content were found in the analysis of the newspaper; eight categories of subject content were found in federal miscellaneous radio programs, while only three categories of content were found in the magazine. Finally, the fact may be recalled from the consideration of the amount of federal publicity in chapter iv, that the newspaper devoted 15 per cent of its total space to news of the federal administration, while the magazines gave only an estimated 3.6 per cent of their total.

Certain generalizations about media are relevant in connection with these comparisons of content. For one thing, the speed of production and distribution of the medium to the audience is important in the choice of an outlet for some types of releases. Facts from records and research and announcements of policy generally call for rapid delivery through the newspaper or radio. The magazines, with a more leisurely tempo, can be used, in addition, for more prolonged and profound explanations and discussions of policy, but they are less useful for the distribution of news more strictly defined. On the other hand, the magazine is unique as a mass medium for the descrip-

tion of work and equipment, because its longer articles and editorial custom of exposition allow it to deal more deliberately with matters outside the realm of spot news.

The speed with which newspapers are produced also means that their procedure for collecting items is more attuned to the quick release than to the contemplative discussion. Much of the publicity of federal agencies is distributed in the form of spot news. This form is fortunately the cheapest way of distributing effective information, as the Department of Agriculture once discovered in the comparable realm of persuasive teaching, and this fact adds to the emphasis put upon newspapers as a medium for publicity.<sup>5</sup>

The difference in types of audience for the media is also a factor in their usefulness for certain kinds of content. The newspaper and radio audience is diffused, large, and heterogeneous so that a release in either is placed before many different interest groups. The particular interest group sought by the publicist must find the item among numerous other items on varied subjects. Magazines differ in that for technical and trade magazines and also for general types of popular magazines, the audience is selected by interest. The publicist knows that an electrical engineering journal will reach electrical engineers, that a so-called class magazine will reach a particular economic or interest group of readers.

The public administrator may find, in short, among the three chief media of mass circulation, outlets for both the rapid distribution of spot news on policy and program and the slower but fuller explanation and justification of policy. He may find space for descriptive releases on the work and equipment of an agency (i.e., on the instruments of government) in the magazines and to a less degree in the radio. He will find chiefly the newspaper as an outlet for the factual type of release taken from the routine fact-gathering agencies.

<sup>5</sup> H. J. Baker and M. C. Wilson, *Relative Costs of Extension Methods Which Influence Changes in Farm and Home Practices* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Technical Bull. 125 [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929]).

At the same time he will find that the very interest of the three mass media in these categories of news confines his choice of content to the categories. He must make his releases conform in subject content and in length of presentation to the editorial traditions of the media. If he wants to inject novelty into a release or go into labored detail to make his point, he must turn to the miscellaneous media such as pamphlets, speeches, exhibits, strip-films, or motion pictures produced under his own control.

Releases may also be unacceptable to media because they offend the religious, political, personal, or economic prejudices of the person or groups in control of the media. The subject of venereal disease was at first barred from print and radio on grounds of taste. The iniquities of food and drug manufacturers can seldom be arrayed in newspapers and magazines which sell food and drug advertising. The government publicity agent, in other words, will not infrequently have to resort to substitute media because his program offends the owners of the mass media, as well as because the content he requires may not conform to the editorial requirements of the media.

The question of control, in fact, becomes the paramount factor in the choice of media, whether it be control by government over the media of its own production or control of the mass media by owners with biases of their own. It should be repeated that government publicity finds its main outlet now by the tolerance of the newspapers and magazines. They might in a crisis, as when their business security is threatened by public policy, defeat the government publicist by subtle distortion of his releases or by outright refusal to print publicity. The radio is under partial control by government and could not refuse to broadcast administrative publicity, but sabotage in delivery and reluctance to give time could make life much harder than now for government publicity men. The miscellaneous media, such as pamphlets, speeches, movies, exhibits, although much more expensive than the use of mass media, remain essential supplements to the mass media. The publicist in these can say

all he wants to say in whatever style he chooses without regard for the editorial practices or owner prejudices of the mass media. He may in a critical conflict of interests go directly to sympathetic groups, or more typically, send a line official to make a face-to-face statement, and this would be probably the most effective medium of all if the funds allowed sufficient scope of distribution by such an expensive method.

Clearly, two assumptions emerge. One is that an agency engaged in a program that is against the economic interests or emotional affiliations of the controllers of mass media or a program that requires releases not in editorial conformity to the practices of mass media must stress the miscellaneous media under its own control more than an agency whose program is inoffensive to and whose releases conform to custom. The other is that in a general crisis of conflict between private interest and public governmental interest, the government publicist would greatly expand the use of his own media and would make widespread substitutions for his present noncrisis emphasis on the mass media.

Finally, a word may be said about the emerging innovations in the techniques of using the chosen media, whatever they are. It is probable that government publicity offices may take the lead in finding more effective ways of preparing releases. Some of the contributions already made have been mentioned earlier. Pictorial statistics found an early American welcome in government pamphlets. The photography and motion pictures of Resettlement Administration have been an unquestionable influence on the use of the camera for documentation of social conditions. The experiments in dramatizations of information by the Federal Radio Project in the Office of Education will no doubt affect the radio technique of other offices and will probably, through the distribution of scripts to school radio clubs, bring gradual changes in the informational broadcasts of local nongovernmental groups. This is not to say, however, that the techniques used by federal offices now are uniformly advancing, for in general the contrary condition of conforming rather

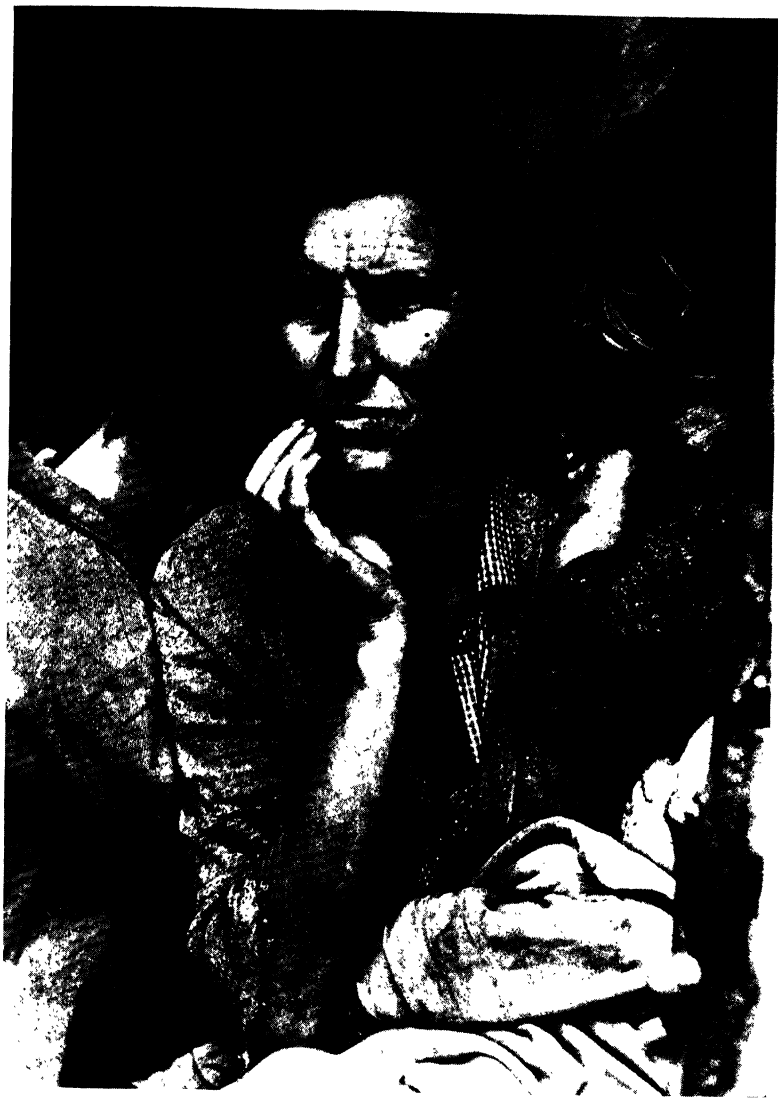
than inventing is more typical of these publicists. But the significant point is that innovations are being made by a few government offices and that their apparent success will probably convert other offices to new techniques.

#### A NOTE ON PROGRAM

Some agencies are prominent in the analysis of the newspaper (Table 1) for an emphasis on the factual type of release. Some are outstanding in the newspaper and magazines (Table 2) for the number of references to policy, achievements, and procedure, or, in other words, to explanations and in some cases questions or justifications concerning the agency's role and performance. Some get notice for their work or equipment, and some are recognized chiefly only through the subject matter with which they deal.

It is interesting that no striking groupings of agencies appear in these categories of relative emphases, with the exception that agencies engaged in violent or outdoor work (e.g., Army, Navy, Federal Bureau of Investigation, or Bureau of Reclamation) seem to be unique in getting emphasis in the magazines on their work and equipment. In general, it may be said that most federal agencies receive notice in two or more of the main fields of subject content and that no agency is engaged solely in promoting its virtues through releases dealing exclusively with its achievements, policies, or progress, the category in which pure pleading for a cause would be found. On the other hand, this category ranks first in all media, thus suggesting that most federal agencies enjoy some discussion or explanation of their policy.

If any generalization can safely be made on the basis of such evidence, it is that no single objective dominates the publicity program of any federal agency. Each office, on the contrary, has a complex purpose in that various aspects of its program must be publicized and the publicity must be varied to suit the purposes. Federal publicity in the present is not crisis pub-



#### MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL WORKER'S FAMILY

This woman of thirty-two is the mother of seven children. She is the wife of a migrant agricultural worker of the type served by federal rural relief and resettlement. (Photo by Dorothea Lange.)



licity. It seeks no change in the location of political control. Some agencies, such as Federal Housing Administration or the Department of Commerce, issue publicity in aid of private interests. Others reflect in noticeable degree the conflict attending the trend toward governmental regulation of business, but even these refrain from outright statements of antibusiness aims. Like the aims of the government which is represented, the publicity from federal agencies is varied in its purposes and in the emphases put upon certain types of content. The publicity agent with a strong desire to accomplish a redistribution of political control or income would find himself helpless in a federal office at this stage of the political and economic development of the United States. His program would have to conform to the mixed aims of the government which he would be serving. This fact makes ridiculous all the alarms over "a New Deal propaganda machine" or "government by propaganda."

Within the framework of this noncrisis program of varied purpose, changes will come first in techniques and administration rather than in aims for campaigns. If any one useful first improvement can be suggested from the many connected with publicity program-making and execution, it would be measurement. The present wasteful ignorance of audience and of results could be lessened considerably by more attention to the available techniques of rough analysis. Publicity men to be effective must above all know the receptivity of their audience to various symbols. They must be sensitive to shifts in the focus of attention in the groups with which they are dealing. In isolating groups that can be expected to favor the program of their agency, they should know not only the organized groups of allied interest but also the probable psychological groups that could be utilized in distribution. The complete approach to measurement would be developed in terms of experience and need, though a few possible tangible steps may be mentioned here to illustrate the point. The relation of practicing publicity men to scientific studies of attitudes was discussed earlier. A more promising field of social research in terms of usefulness to



practitioners, is concerned with the definition of psychological groups.<sup>6</sup>

It is conceivable that federal publicists, or any other publicists for that matter, can utilize some of these findings or, better, develop less tedious methods of finding the psychological groups in their areas. If a crop-adjustment program is to be explained in a community, the publicist should know which farmers to reach first and what content would be most likely to incite warmth for the program. If old age insurance must be justified, the publicist should know which workmen enjoy prestige among their fellows. The analysis of audience structure and receptivity to symbol content resolves into a small and particularized sort of measurement at the foundation level of the public, namely, in the unit groups that are to be reached, whether they are organized and recorded in the city directory or psychological and defined only by the way the members feel toward some object.

The most revealing techniques of measurement now used by federal publicity offices, as described in chapter v, are the straw polls conducted by private, commercial investigators; the analysis of individual responses, as by weighing letter mail for comments; and the daily perusal of what newspapers and magazines have printed about government. These are all valuable for what they show, but it is submitted that none of these techniques, save possibly the analysis of mail, gives the publicity man an intimate understanding of what his particular audience is really like, what it is thinking about his agency in general, what its views are on collateral but indicative topics in

<sup>6</sup> See particularly J. L. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive, a New Approach to the Problem of Human Interrelations* (Nervous and Mental Diseases Publishing Co., 1934) for a closed community, and two relevant studies on a New England village (George A. Lundberg and Margaret Lawsing, "The Sociography of Some Community Relations," *American Sociological Review*, II, No. 3 [June, 1937], p. 318, and George A. Lundberg and Mary Steele, "Social Attraction Patterns in a Village," *Sociometry, a Journal of Inter-personal Relations*, I, Nos. 3 and 4 [January and April, 1938], p. 375). Cf. also James E. Foster, "The Group in Terms of Propaganda," *American Sociological Review*, II, No. 2, (April, 1937), p. 247.

the realm of politics, or of what persons and groups in specific areas should be approached first in the distribution of publicity.

Perhaps the first major addition for government publicists to make to their programs is a geographically extended visit to the citizens who make up their audience. This would be done with particular relevance to the work of government and so would not duplicate the work of the private and increasingly common sampling of public opinion on various unrelated topics. The technique by government might utilize field workers, perhaps by the mere filing of a report periodically on what they hear in their rounds and on the social and economic facts encountered in their territories. The ubiquity of federal employees, from postmen to fruit experts, is a fact of enormous potential and as yet unheeded significance for the systematic recording of what groups in the public think about policies and practices of government. These field agents might, after trial, discover that the leaders of psychological groups and even of organized groups were reliable reflectors of the opinions of their satellites, at least for the working purposes of reporting rough opinion.<sup>7</sup> This would simplify their procedure so that the innovation of periodic sampling would not cause a serious revision of their work routine and the results would be reliable nevertheless. The continuation of the present techniques of press digests, mail analysis, and watching the private straw polls might be supplemented by a more particularized periodic survey of the opinions specifically directed toward the programs and acts of federal administration. Certainly, the importance for the publicity office to keep informed about its

<sup>7</sup> One investigator found a high correlation between the attitudes of officers of organized clubs and of their members toward labor unions. There was also a significant correlation between club-officer attitudes and those of nonclub members. The largest disparity was between ministers and their congregations, the ministers being more "liberal" than their followers (Rowena Wyant, "An Analysis of Specific Economic and Social Attitudes in Bennington, Vermont" [Bachelor's thesis, Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont, June, 1938, unpublished]).

audience and to stay continually sensitive to the audience cannot be overstressed in the making of publicity programs.

#### CO-ORDINATION ESSENTIAL

All reforms in the administration of federal publicity, such as the adoption of audience analysis and measurement of results, rest basically upon the necessity for the co-ordination of structure and practice in the publicity organization. A suggested plan for such co-ordination was outlined in chapter vi. It is also relevant here among the conclusions to re-emphasize the all-important role of smooth operation in administration and to point out in summary the relation of co-ordination to other aspects of the total field of publicity.

Program-making, as one affected factor, could be much more economical and more effective for the government as a whole if publicity offices were bound together in some organization in which information could be readily shared. The prospect of offices competing with each other for space in media or, worse, competing for space to publicize the same general topic is logically unacceptable. Technical services, too, could be shared by offices in co-ordination for an unquestionable improvement in the quality of technical releases. The lack of available technical skills now felt by some offices would disappear as a problem of planning the publicity program, while the general quality of all releases from government offices would be raised. In the realm of measurement of audience structure and opinion and of the effect of publicity, which is recommended for economical practice, co-ordination will be essential before the facts acquired from measurement can be shared by all offices.

More important even than this improvement in program-making is the necessity for co-ordination and sharing of information toward the achievement of a commonly understood purpose for federal publicity. Should this be achieved, one beneficial result might be the clear definition of the status of the publicity expert as essential in public administration and the consequent strengthening of morale in the corps. If an under-

standing of common purpose is a primary factor in morale, as developed in chapter vii, co-ordination is inescapable as a necessary step toward the attainment of understanding and loyalty. Several steps toward such co-ordination were suggested earlier. Here, with relevance particularly to the practice of federal publicity taken as a whole, another may be suggested. It is that publicity men in the federal service should organize in a professional group to consider jointly their objectives, their standards, and their role in public administration. Such a group could be instrumental, for one thing, in defining the various types of government publicity and in justifying each for its own end. No chance exists for reaching a common purpose when a portion of the present officials interpret their job as answering requests for information, when others think of themselves as merely reporters of routine news, when a third portion claims to be nothing more than a group of educators but practices some typical publicity techniques, and when a large portion of the older members of the craft resent the aggressive men who openly admit that they are promoting a program. The amount of promotion that gets mixed with education will vary from one agency to another and from one subject to another. Probably some persuasion will be practiced by all offices, and some education will be a part of all persuasion. It seems a useless and meaningless argument, but it concerns far too many federal publicity officials to be ignored. It should be discussed until an agreement is reached on the proper role of governmental administrative publicity.

Professional organization and definition of aims should also provide the means of creating in the minds of publicity men a clearer understanding of their place in modern administration. It is time for them to be removed from the mysterious recesses of legal ambiguity and also from their obscure position in the executive structure. They will have to make their own assertions of status, and before they can make those claims, they will have to reach an agreement among themselves on their aims and on standards of professional expertness and philoso-

phy. These agreements can be reached only through association with one another.

Co-ordination, finally, is essential for the proper interpretation of public administration, in its policies and acts, to the citizen who is bewildered by the confusion of federal organization. The publicity man is above all an explainer, standing between line officials who think in terms of operating techniques and the citizen who is the object of operation. He must tell the citizen why official programs are what they are; he must say how the benefits of public policy can be obtained; he must justify some acts as preferable to others; he must give the citizen an understanding of the citizen's secure location in the manifold operations of a vast public instrument known collectively as "the government." To do this, he must present a synthesis of all the operations of government, at least of all those operations in single fields of subject matter, and he cannot do this without co-ordination in planning and executing publicity programs.

The symbols used in hostility to government, symbols such as "bureaucracy," "red tape," "pork barrel," "crooked politicians," are directed against a concept of a unified national government. The fact that such an administration does not exist, that government is a system of complex agencies working for complex ends, that even the political party that happens to be in power does not represent a unity, makes little difference when the hostility is turned against any unit within the disparate whole. The administrative agent, whether high or low in rank, whether in the field or in Washington, must face in his job citizen attitudes directed toward this stereotype of "the government." Citizens have small place in their attitudes for the virtues or vices of individual agencies. In such a milieu the chief function of federal publicity offices may well be to attempt to build up a stereotype of an approvable "government" as a whole, rather than to attempt to get advantages for particular agencies in the attitudes of citizens and clients. Even when an individual agency is successful now in getting approval in a

limited time and space, it is still handicapped in its day-by-day job by the wider skepticism toward "government." The total hostility affects all agencies within its aura.

The present isolated, atomized organization of federal publicity offices has been remarkably ineffective in combating the hostility to government as a stereotype. It has spent its energies in promoting the programs of segments, often of segments within the same subject field of operations. Perhaps co-ordination would open a new phase of understanding between citizen and public official which has never yet been attained in a world that retains so much of the ruler-subject habit of thought. Perhaps administrative publicity, subject to social responsibility, subject to serving the public interest, and subject to the co-ordination within the administration of a common purpose would achieve sympathy for the aims and services of government which would both make the process of administration easier and enhance the benefits received by citizens from public administration.

The conclusions and proposals throughout the study have assumed that the practice of administrative publicity is an appropriate practice in public administration and that it can be responsible to the public interest rather than a threat to that interest. It is now time to return to the questions concerning publicity by government, questions which were introduced in the catalogue of hostility and the justification of publicity in its present role in chapter i, and to examine publicity in relation to the future of democratic values. The following chapter represents an attempt to justify administrative publicity in its predicted future role.

## CHAPTER IX

### SOME IMPLICATIONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE PUBLICITY

**T**WO themes have appeared more than once in the preceding pages. One is the all-pervading hostility to the very practice of publicity by government administrators and the effects of this hostility in record-keeping, co-ordination, and morale. The other is the thesis that federal administrative publicity should be recognized as a proper staff function in public administration and that, having been recognized, it should be legitimized through the removal of present laws, which are designed more for prevention than for control of this practice. If publicity is approved, it can then be treated as other accepted functions. Its records can be brought out of hiding and examined in the calm light of reason; its operations can be co-ordinated without fear of attack; its practitioners can enjoy the dignity of men who are considered useful.

Aid to publicity, whether by recognition of its merit or by co-ordination of its practice, is, however, denounced by some honest and intelligent observers in these days of anxiety for freedom. Administrative publicity particularly is suspected as a trend toward thought-control by government; the harmless character it may present now is visualized as a possible evil under some future political party that would frown on free expression.

The innocence of the present publicity offices of any intention toward complete censorship of communication in the manner of European totalitarianism is so patent that no defense against charges of dictatorship in the present is needed. Contemporary publicity men and publicity practices in government are merely competing with private propaganda. There is no ministry of public enlightenment to co-ordinate the arts, to

prescribe the content of press, pulpit, theater, and radio, to stage exhibits in glory of the leader, to stream posters from the fronts of Jackson Place buildings while crowds of ordered citizens hail the chief in Lafayette Square. Placing the present publicity offices in the same category as the complete propaganda controls of dictator states makes happy reading in anti-New Deal journals but suggests that hysteria is partly responsible for the interpretation.

A more reasonable concern is for the future, and the advocate of legitimate government publicity must therefore justify his position in the United States of today in the light of the concern for the future freedom of thought.

#### THE PRESS AND DEMOCRACY

The hostility to publicity which was catalogued in chapter i rests on two major premises: (1) publicity agents in government limit the freedom of the press and other media to search out public evil and to serve as the public's watchmen at the seat of power and (2) when the bureaucracy is allowed to issue publicity, it may escape responsibility through disguising its true condition or through usurping the influence over public opinion that properly belongs to Congress or to agencies outside of government.

The first of these two arguments comes chiefly from journalists whose variations on the central idea of their desire for unencumbered access to the governmental executive were stated in the opening chapter. Journalists assume, in good faith, that the press is able to be the unimpeachable guardian of the public interest which the Bill of Rights intended when constitutional freedom of the press was proclaimed. Reporters, according to this view, should keep a constant, skeptical eye on public officials and sound the alarm whenever signs of error appear in either administrative policy or practice. They are the unbiased ferrets of news, and nothing that is news escapes them. They should not be impeded in any way when they want to investigate an official or a practice.



But equally honest and intelligent men have lamented the failure of the press to live up to its dedication as the bulwark of democracy, have questioned its ability to fulfil a public trust, or have urged it to mend its ways.<sup>1</sup> All such generalizations are subject to some exceptions for individual newspapers, but there is no denying that newspapers are preponderantly the reflectors of the views of business which has a first interest in making profits and a second concern for the public welfare. The reporter on a salary may be diligent in ceaseless effort to serve his readers with all the news written without bias, but he soon will learn that putting the emphasis where his owner desires it is the better part of employees' wisdom.<sup>2</sup> A dominant interest in private profit means that American publishers by and large will support only the social theories and the governmental policies that are favored by the business élite in the community. Their reporters will face no opposition on their coverage of routine news items, but when news of importance conflicts with the doctrines of private profit, the reporters must conform to their publishers' desires for coloring. If the reporters do not make the desired emphasis in their stories, desk men will add the emphasis in headlines. It happens that much of the news of federal administration will be disapproved by owner interests because it deals with plans prepared by experts for resolving the economic and social dilemmas resulting from private business enterprise in a monopoly economy. The reporter subject to pressure from an owning élite is, in other words, unable to report without bias much of the news from federal bureaus. The extent to which the reporter is deprived of freedom by his

<sup>1</sup> See John Dewey, "Our Un-free Press," *Common Sense*, IV, No. 11 (November, 1935), 6-7; Silas Bent, *Ballyhoo* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927), chap. x, pp. 371-79; George Seldes, *Freedom of the Press* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1935); William Allen White, address at the University of Pennsylvania on "A Free Press in a Machine Age," reported in the *New York Times*, May 3, 1938, p. 9; Dean Carl W. Ackerman, annual report for the Columbia University School of Journalism, reported in the *New York Times*, November 26, 1937, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Leo C. Rosten, *The Washington Correspondents* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937), chap. x.

own employer damages the fine justice of his demand for freedom from government publicists. The defense of government publicists can be based on the fact that they, even while serving the interests of their bureaus, are as capable as the reporters of distributing reliable news.

In addition to owner interests, the sheer physical inability of the press to cover Washington's many news sources would prevent reporters from fulfilling their role of vigilant protector of the public interest. The government publicity agent serves the reporter with news from many sources, and the reporter chooses what he thinks is most important. The news is selected, of course, but the strong principle of news interest requires the publicity agent to submit in the great majority of cases the same stories the reporter would write if he could visit every federal source in person.

Even assuming that reporters would abound in sufficient numbers to visit all the federal offices each day, they might still find publicity agents in charge of press contacts, and they argue that such protection of the public official from his proper watchers is an invasion of press freedom. It is difficult to see the full reason behind this argument. An official, whatever his title, can withhold information, can select news, and can protect himself by giving "off-the-record" news which the reporter may not use. The mere existence of a publicity agent in the outer office of the executive does not create the condition of news control. The reporter must frequently get his news from sources outside the official one regardless of whether the press agent has tried to conceal the information, and, as at least two enemies of government publicity admit, the good reporter in Washington can frequently find other sources of information.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "The New Deal Lobby," *Business Week*, May 18, 1935, pp. 14-15; also, in a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, September 2, 1937, p. 15, the *Chicago Tribune* made the following claim: "The full power of official Washington is constantly in use to suborn and coerce Washington correspondents. . . . Officials squander public funds to issue propaganda designed to distort facts. The seductions of official society are employed. And, these devices failing, bold attempts are made to intimidate and punish those who resist the yoke. The

So long as a reporter is free to find his news wherever he can and free to print whatever he finds, the government publicity man is not able to suppress an item that has been found. One need only examine the hostility of the major part of the press to the Franklin Roosevelt administration during the presidential campaign of 1936 to see that government does not censor the press in the United States and that neither press agents of the party in power nor of the administration can govern the content of the news about government. The government publicity man, to repeat, is able only to select news to present to a medium in competition with the selected news that is presented by publicity agents for private business, for rival parties, or for pressure groups of various sorts.<sup>4</sup> This ability could be exercised by the line official as well as by the publicity expert and would be so exercised if the line official had to deal directly with the press. Against the charge of interference with the reporter in his attempts to reach the executive is, furthermore, the administrative economy of the publicity agent's work. Should the concentrated army of reporters in Washington ever decide to see singly a federal official, they would consume more time than he could have in a twenty-four-hour day. In the busier agencies the press office demands a staff to fill requests from publications for information, a job that would otherwise have to be handled, presumably, by the chief official whom the reporters expect to see in lieu of his representative. This is one of the

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Chicago Tribune's correspondents will not be suborned or coerced. It is their job to get the facts and to report them in true perspective. They are not taken into camp by the tremendous output of bulletins, reports and official pronouncements. Undeterred by social blandishments or threats of reprisal, they cover official and unofficial sources of news, watching attentively the course of events and assembling through careful research the full facts. When you read the news of Washington in the Chicago Tribune you get the truth, dispatched by competent observers and writers. You get concise, informative, unbiased reports. Sharply focused against the background that gives proper significance to the happening, you get the news which Washington censors would kill or color."

<sup>4</sup> Silas Bent estimates that news of murder, suicide, forgery, and fire is the only news in a modern newspaper that does not come in some way from press agents (*op. cit.*, pp. 133 ff.).

main reasons why government officials have publicity representatives.

Still another reason why the press has not served unquestioned as the provider of all the news is the fact that reporters are men with loyalties and limitations. They add their own touch to the news even in addition to the prejudiced tone required by the owner-publisher.<sup>5</sup> They approve or disapprove within their own hopes and fears of administrative policy; they like or dislike the administrative official who executes the policy; and the bare facts of information which they gather will be presented to the reader with some color. From the viewpoint of an argument for objectivity in the news, it is equally deplorable whether the bias is toward a loyalty to the owning or nonowning classes, toward the saints or sinners, toward the incumbent administration or against it.

Besides the loyalties, whatever they may be, that interfere with objectivity, reporters are unprepared by education and unable by limits of time and strength to understand the vast complexities of much of the news they write. Their felt need for more training in the social studies has been reported in an analysis of the careers of Washington correspondents.<sup>6</sup> The plight of newspapers when the sit-down strike and the rise of the Committee for Industrial Organization appeared and among reporters "the number of Grade A Labor specialists could be counted on the fingers of one hand" is not much different from the more common predicament of newspapers facing a new economic policy or a federal public works bill that has complex consequences.<sup>7</sup> When the National Industrial Re-

<sup>5</sup> Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz, after analyzing thirty-six months of the *New York Times* stories on the Russian Revolution and finding almost invariably that the news was misleading, concluded that "the chief censors were hope and fear in the minds of reporters and editors." The correspondents accepted news from sources which were of kindred desires (*A Test of the News*, supplement to the *New Republic*, August 4, 1920).

<sup>6</sup> Rosten, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-65.

<sup>7</sup> See *Time*, XXIX, No. 26 (June 28, 1937), 41-44, for the estimate of the number of labor specialists among American reporters and for a general review

covery Act was first adopted, its enormous monopolistic significance, its meaning to the consumer in price control, and its suggestion of wider controls over business were overlooked, by and large, by a press whose reporters could not see these problems until after some time and after a change of heart toward the leadership of Mr. Roosevelt. The same might be said of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Housing Acts, or the Holding Company and Securities Acts. It need not be argued that reporters must not be professors for, if they were, readers would not subscribe to their papers. The point here is that many reporters cannot serve adequately as the popularizers of involved data which they should be in a democracy.

The claim to unlimited freedom has been made chiefly by the press, hence most attention has been given to the press in this problem of preserving freedom. The press also is alone among the three media, press, motion pictures, and radio, in its protection by name in the Constitution. The motion pictures and radio have been subject to governmental control, the first by local government and the second by the federal government. It so happens that the federal government has never tried extensively to control the political content of these media beyond competing with other governments, organizations, and business interests for an outlet for publicity. Nor have these media claimed immunity in the vociferous manner of the press by attacking federal publicity offices as threats to democracy.

#### PUBLICITY AS A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY

To say that the press is not justified in condemning threats to its freedom when it has failed to serve citizens with unbiased news is still not an answer to the second charge that government publicity is a threat to the very life of democracy. True, it may be harmless in its present innocuous state of competing with other publicity, but any practice that gives the bureaucracy the power to enhance its own security and prestige, the

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of the coverage of the Labor news. Paul Gallico, an ex-sports writer recently turned general reporter, covered one strike situation.

argument runs, contains the seeds of oppression. No bureau should be able to proclaim its own virtues, said the proponents of the 1913 rider to forbid the employment of any publicity expert without consent of Congress.<sup>8</sup> The administration can rule the country without reference to Congress and the voters if its propaganda machine is strong enough, say others. Administrative mistakes would never come to light; administrative negligence, incompetence, and malfeasance could continue forever, and citizens would become impotent slaves whose lives would be dictated by petty bureaucrats while a propaganda ministry suppressed all pertinent information about the oppression. Especially would the danger of bureaucratic domination threaten if administrative publicity offices were co-ordinated to allow common practices for a unified purpose. Democracy, they say, requires constant suspicion of the bureaucracy and constant scrutiny of its acts with a view to condemnation.

This fear is not confined to considerations of publicity but is typical of the whole liberal dilemma in the painful adjustment to an urban industrial world. The fear of bureaucratic control over news sources is, in fact, only an aspect of the larger fear of bureaucratic control over anything pertaining to individual freedom, and it cannot be considered apart from the whole. An excursion into the state of democracy is necessary here as a setting for the future implications of administrative publicity.

Democracy, or liberalism, in the past has meant many things to many men. It has been the basic principle of free trade, competitive business enterprise, freedom from governmental regulation of business, and the paradoxical inalienable right of the businessman to demand aid from government. It has meant the sanctity of private property in land, personal goods, or stocks and bonds without the attendant admission of any social responsibility attached to property.<sup>9</sup> It has meant freedom for

<sup>8</sup> *U.S. Congressional Record*, House, September 6, 1913 (63d Cong., 1st sess.), pp. 4409-11.

<sup>9</sup> R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1920), chaps. ii and iii.

religious sects (but not for a Catholic to be elected President) and freedom for private bodies vowed to drive Jews, Catholics, Socialists, Communists, Non-partisan Leaguers, and End-Poverty-in-California believers from the land. Democracy is a way to profit with government aid for an industrial élite and a way to miserable lives with government aid for share-croppers and lettuce-pickers.

One element common to all definitions of democracy is a recognition of the dignity of free choice in personal, intimate decisions by individuals. It may be called, as well, a belief in the dignity of human personality as a social value.<sup>10</sup> Since it is a belief, it cannot be isolated readily for exact description under present conditions of social measurement, but it is, nevertheless, a powerful factor in the American tradition. It is the one comfort in the democratic way that all men of tolerance agree is valuable. It is the right of the person to read whatever books are interesting, to study the subjects he chooses, to talk without fear in the privacy of an intimate circle, to explore for new knowledge without political prescription of what he may find, to create or enjoy the arts of his own choosing, to worship whatever gods he likes, to submit to no other person in utter resignation of any claim to choice, to live in freedom to satisfy his own personal needs and interests within the opportunities offered by his culture and within the responsibilities of social, as distinct from personal, behavior. The desire, then, of democrats is to preserve this sort of freedom in whatever new order may come.

As an operating government, democracy is an endless stir of conflicting groups with the better instruments of power and control, such as the press discussed above, in the hands of those who can pay for them, whether through ownership or through the ability to hire experts in propaganda who can use them without owning them. Decisions of governmental policy in this hectic struggle are made by legislatures and administrative

<sup>10</sup> This point is developed eloquently and sincerely by Thomas Mann in his lecture, *The Coming Victory of Democracy* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1938).

officials subject to pressures brought by all the groups in conflict, while a universal but elusive general welfare of all elements in the community must be protected by the legislators, by public administrators, and by their aides in such semipublic research agencies as universities and foundations. Victory for the general welfare is by no means assured. It becomes most remote when issues are decided by invective spread irresponsibly by press, pulpit, or radio orators, as when a nonpolitical bill for administrative reorganization is distorted to appear as a threat of dictatorship.<sup>11</sup> The public in the mass neither initiates policy nor defines its own needs; it may periodically give or withhold consent, in a judgment affected by propaganda, to a policy initiated and adopted by political leaders operating under the conflict of group interests.

Government by self-seeking groups in conflict becomes inevitably government by subsidy. Each resolution of conflicting interests will mean benefits to some interest at the expense of the entire community, for democracy in one familiar definition prescribes rights as paramount to duties, and democratic government must give profusely but take reluctantly. "Congressmen have to be re-elected," the folk say. Business interests have been receiving governmental aid since the days of Hamilton and Washington, first in the adoption of the Constitution, next in the western lands and internal improvements, then through grants to the railroads, the really grand flowering of the protective tariff, the creation of research and reporting offices in the Department of Commerce, and lately through the public-works program. For many years business and wealth were relieved of even a progressive income tax as a minor recognition of duty attached to benefit. Churches, schools, and charitable institutions were subsidized by tax exemptions. Farmers won the free services of the greatest agricultural research organization in the world and the privileges of easy loans. The veterans from 1776 and afterward drew the lucrative favor of a government in which they had influence. Labor saw a federal

<sup>11</sup> *Time*, XXXI, No. 13 (March 28, 1938), and following issues.



department created to serve it with data and by 1937 had upon the books a law supporting its right to organize. Simultaneously, social security insurance for old age pensions and direct benefits to the needy old were provided to be administered by government. Relief for the destitute and unemployed was accepted irrevocably as an obligation of government. Subsidies for low-cost housing were provided as a permanent service. The procession of bills in aid of citizens of all ranks but resulting from group demands has been steady throughout the history of the Republic and shows signs of continuing into the future. The state, once thought to be a police agency, is now seen as a service state, and the more services are added, the more bureaucratic organization is required to administer them.

At the same time, technological developments in production, transportation, and communication recommend an increasing concentration of business in large monopolies capable of rationalizing the system of production and distribution. A concentration of financial control attends the increasing monopoly of production and distribution. The corporation as a form of collective enterprise develops into domination by a few large corporations and the concentration of economic power in their managers.<sup>12</sup> Technological changes affect, too, the instruments of pressure on government, so that groups can more effectively and more immediately apply their wills to legislatures and executives. Concentration accelerates, and government, loath to desert the traditions of democracy, must attempt to keep all interests satisfied with grants and to utter frequent opposition to monopolies as a denial of the competitive credo of democracy, at the same time that monopolistic measures (e.g., attempts to control production or prices) are adopted to conform to the trend toward monopoly.

The net result of the concessions by government to groups is more participation by government in the economic operations of the community. This participation may take the form

<sup>12</sup> Adolf A. Berle, Jr., and Gardiner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), chaps. ii and iii.

of control, for most benefits have strings attached; or it may take the form of encouragement to private enterprise for profit. Usually the elements of control and leadership are so mutually blended in the process of administration that a sharp line cannot be drawn between them.<sup>13</sup> Government gives benefits; it attaches regulatory provisos; it gives aid through leadership to the groups' own efforts; but no matter what the cause, the result is more participation by government in economic affairs. The future holds more government rather than less, more tax collection and scrutiny of incomes, more supervision of trade practices and wage policies, more intrusion of public authority into areas not long since claimed to be private, more affronts to the tradition of democracy as freedom to demand and get aid from government without assuming concurrent obligations. The future of administrative publicity will be involved in the future of this governmental role and cannot be considered in isolation from the role of public authorities in the economic and social process of adjustment to change.

#### THE GROWTH OF GOVERNMENT

An increase of governmental activity in the economic system seems as certain as any social trend now observable.<sup>14</sup> Simultaneously, an increase in federal authority, in distinction to the states, has been steadily under way, as reflected in the line of judicial decisions which expand the commerce power and interpret the Fourteenth Amendment to enhance federal supremacy. The federal government, in other words, is the chief participant in this growing role of governmental aid and regulation. In the dual aim of helping and of regulating industries for the sake of the nation, it has brought under its watchful eye various practices in the fields of transportation,

<sup>13</sup> James M. Landis, *The Administrative Process* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

<sup>14</sup> Carroll H. Woody, "The Growth of Governmental Functions," and Charles E. Merriam, "Government and Society," in President's Research Committee on Social Trends, *Recent Social Trends in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1933), Vol. II.

banking, communication, agriculture, trading in securities, use of natural resources, distilling and interstate dealing in liquor, processing foods and drugs, labor relations, and general trade practices. A new type of democratic government has emerged, in which groups within the community put themselves in the hands of government as the doctor and agree to follow the regimen prescribed, at least so far as they believe it will produce better economic health. The coercion essential for governing comes here from the sanction for government on the part of the majority voice in the groups to be regulated.

As the need for more government is in part the result of a technological development toward complexity, so the diagnosis, the treatment, and the discipline of the economic patients must be handled by experts in the particular problems encountered. One may say, too, that expert knowledge in detailed specialties is not the typical possession of either legislatures or courts at law. Individual legislators and judges may attain to a thorough knowledge of several specialties, but whole legislatures and courts in general are uninformed in the technical data so essential for the formulation of effective policy. This means that the role of government in its participation in economic affairs is essentially an administrative role. In a world that demands factual analysis for its orderly conduct, this role involves administrative leadership in making public and private policy and administrative discretion in the execution of the public policy.

The gradual change toward more governmental participation has been accomplished up to now without the loss of personal freedom because the American executive has never adopted for more than temporary periods a formal use of violence and suppression of free speech as a technique of control. No ideology glorifying complete submission to the leader has been proclaimed to pain those who enjoy the democratic tradition of complaint. The adjustment to new conditions has not been complete, it is true, nor has the distribution of benefits from government been even, but what change has been

accomplished has entailed little suppression of individual freedom as that is defined in the democratic tradition. The executive, in other words, has gained in strength through political leadership by persuasion and possession of the essential facts of decision rather than by stressing violence. Presidents, under advice from experts in social adjustment, have often proposed and supported policies to alleviate the social dilemma caused by technological change. Government by administrative leadership has become the prevalent way of government when effective adjustment to social change is demanded. Administrative statesmanship will rise to more and more importance as participation by government is extended over the economic order.

Administrative publicity in the past and now, as defined in chapter i, has been useful in this process of administrative leadership. Presidents and their assistants have gone to the public on many important issues, sometimes to enlist public pressure on Congress and sometimes to explain to the public the program advocated by Congress and the executive leaders. Such governmental publicity up to now has competed with the publicity of private sources, so that the resolution of conflicting interests has been reached always by a compromise in some degree on the part of the executive. In the future, if the assumption is correct that participation by government in the economic system will increase, governmental publicity will become more necessary as an instrument of leadership in establishing new policy and in securing public support and understanding for the program advocated by experts in social engineering.

The danger to those who value a freedom of the spirit and mind and who deplore the pathological indignity of totalitarian ideologies now in power abroad lies not in the trend toward increased governmental participation in all affairs in the United States but in the future location of the governmental control and in the amount of responsibility that can be attached to the control. If the current inconclusive democratic

efforts to establish the social machinery to make adjustments to social change lead into an outright seizure of power by business interests or by a party representing any one group, whether it be business, labor, or farmers, the consequence for democrats is likely to be painful, for an ideological myth necessary to the propaganda of such single-interest control will not favor liberalism. If, on the other hand, the end is a recognition of administrative leadership by the elected executive and his bureaucracy of experts, with such machinery for responsibility as periodic election, questioning by Congress, scrutiny and advice by citizens' groups, a career civil service based on merit, and a recognized system of administrative law and courts to protect citizens against government, there can be hope for the preservation of those elements of the democratic tradition that encourage human dignity and allow the arts and sciences to continue without the handicap of an imposed and contradictory set of premises. In a state that admits the value of experts in making public decisions, there need be no denial of the right of the expert to deal in reality. But in public affairs the admission that experts are important means the rational acceptance of the importance of the executive branch of government where the experts are increasingly dominant.

Not only must we reject the idea that democracy is opposed to bureaucracy, but we must recognize that the future of democracy depends upon its ability to maintain a fully organized bureaucracy. For the industrial system which demands it is with us for better or worse since the life of millions of human beings depends upon it. If a popular government is incapable of maintaining a bureaucratic hierarchy, it is bound to give way to a form of government which will accomplish that, whether it be the dictatorship of an individual or of a small group in the name of the nation, the people, or the proletariat.<sup>15</sup>

The argument, then, is that freedom for the sake of personal dignity in human affairs can be preserved best by an admission of governmental guidance, aid, and control based upon rational diagnosis and treatment of the social malaise resulting from

<sup>15</sup> Carl Joachim Friedrich and Taylor Cole, *Responsible Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 28.

technological change. This implies a continuation of the existing trend toward more executive authority in government and toward more dependence upon the bureaucracy for advice and leadership. Control of the executive can be enhanced by a continuation of periodic elections, by the creation of citizen advisory councils to watch each major executive agency, by a method of recruiting for the bureaucracy the best abilities in the community, and by the creation of a recognized system of administrative courts in which the citizen can claim redress against executive action.<sup>16</sup> The most effective basis of executive responsibility, however, will be the moral desire on the part of the executive to be responsible.

#### MORALE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The foregoing discussion has wandered into the large field of the future of democracy because in no other way can administrative publicity be examined as a potential threat to freedom. Publicity throughout these pages has been seen as a tool of administration. It creates no policy; it enforces no rules; it reflects only the policies and the rules of the bureaucracy to which it is useful as a tool. The possible threats to democracy or the promises for rational social adjustment to change must be found in the policies and practices of the bureaucracy which is represented through publicity and not in the publicity itself. If the bureaucracy is responsible to citizens, its publicity will be used in the sort of administrative leadership that can be approved by advocates of personal free-

<sup>16</sup> Cf. John M. Gaus, "The Responsibility of Public Administration," in Gaus, Leonard D. White, and Marshall E. Dimock, *Frontiers of Public Administration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936); William Yandell Elliot, *The Need for Constitutional Reform* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1935), chaps. ix and x; Frederick F. Blachly and Miriam Oatman, *Administrative Legislation and Adjudication* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1934), chap. xii; Herman Finer, *Theory and Practice of Modern Government* (New York: Dial Press, 1934), pp. 845-84. The whole question of the relationship of the public to executive practices and responsibility in the new democracy is the theme of E. Pendleton Herring, *Public Administration and the Public Interest* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1936).

dom. If the bureaucracy is promoting the interest of one particular group within the community, its publicity will inevitably be used for the ends of the one group.

Beyond the structural and procedural aids to holding the bureaucracy responsible, mentioned above, the basic guaranty of individual liberty under a strong executive must lie in the bureaucratic will to serve the public interest as that interest is defined in each operational situation. No other hope exists for individual rights in a world that must operate through experts organized in complex and powerful agencies to deal with technical and, to the layman, mysterious conditions.

The will to serve the public interest is made up of the morale which comes from participation in a service that offers emotional satisfaction, as discussed in the chapter on personnel; of the recognition of a common purpose, as urged in the chapter on co-ordination; of the personal loyalties and beliefs of human beings imbued with the social values of western culture and its Christian humanitarianism; and of the particular philosophy of public service that comes from institutional work. The tradition of serving the public interest, as it is defined for each office and its particular function, can be as strong in government as the tradition of loyalty to a private firm, college, church, club, or family is true in other realms of group activity. And traditions of loyalty are the stuff of which institutional continuity is made. In the federal bureaucracy, fortunately, this tradition is already widespread. It wants only the assistance of more specific guaranties such as recruitment and promotion by merit on a wider scale, security in a career service, rational organization to allow the recognition of common purposes, or removal of the stigma attached to public service to become universal throughout the service. It waits, too, upon the recognition by Congress of the importance of technical competence in public affairs, the recognition which was assumed above to be inevitable because imposed by the demands of urban industrialism.

The operation of a traditional devotion to the public interest

calls above all for civil servants who are sensitive and sympathetic to the needs and desires of the public with which they deal. It calls for more extensive consultation with the persons affected by administrative acts to make sure that their public interests are interpreted correctly to integrate the citizen in administration.<sup>17</sup> Responsible governmental administration must be close to the client, in the future of executive leadership, and must recognize the difference between the facts which experts find and understand and the information about those facts which conforms to the reading interest of the clients. Leadership must possess special knowledge and skill but know also how to get the consent and support of lay publics through the language of followers. The human warmth of agreeable folk talk will be just as essential in administrative leadership as it is in the stump speeches of Jacksonian candidates or the urbane allusions of big-city politicians. If administrators fail in this communication with their clients, their leadership will be lost to a leader who does know how to speak the language of the followers; and when that happens, the era of individual dignity and personal liberty is closed if the new leader chooses to use his skill for undemocratic ends.

The administrative publicity office will be responsible for this task of communication between bureaucracy and clients. It will be indispensable in a rational government of initiation of policy by the executive, consent and support by the following, and responsibility by administrative leadership that is sensitive to public interests and needs. The future holds not less work but more for federal publicity offices.

Administrative leadership is not the enemy of personal liberty, when liberty in definition is divorced from the obsession with rights sans duties. Instead, the chief hope of making the necessary social adjustment to urban-industrial conditions lies in even more administrative authority under responsibility. The administrative publicist as an aide to the executive, skilled

<sup>17</sup> Gaus, "A Theory of Organization in Public Administration," in Gaus, White, and Dimock, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-90.



in using the instruments of persuasion and explanation, experienced in knowing what the public thinks and says, sensitive to the changing temper of audiences, and confined to the role of communicating policy but not making it, is no more a threat to personal freedom than is the responsible leadership which he serves. Liberty for the individual, as democrats hope to preserve it, is more likely to be drowned in the flood of publicity issued, not by bureaucrats but by demagogues who speak the people's language and serve other gods than freedom.

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